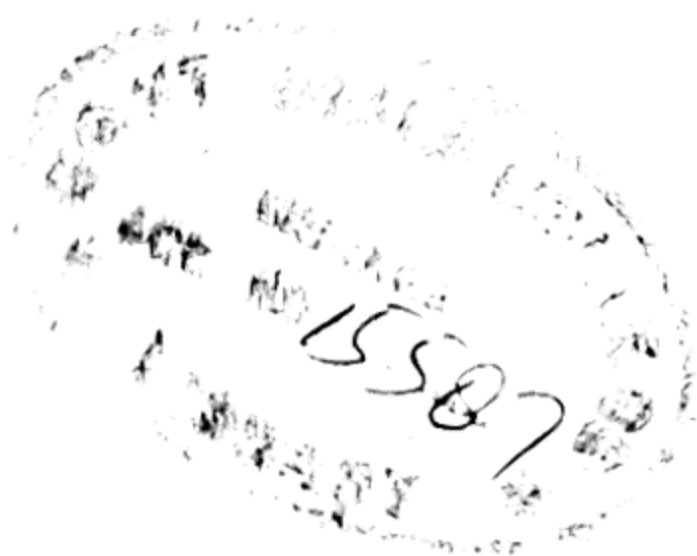


THE FOUNDATIONS OF
INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY
1860—1882

168

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India's Foreign Policy

1860—1882



BISHESHWAR PRASAD

M.A., D.LITT.



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By the same Author :—

Origins of Provincial Autonomy
The Kingdom of Oudh and the
East India Company

Our Foreign Policy Legacy
Changing Modes of Indian
National Movement

MAPS

CENTRAL ASIA <i>At end of volume</i>
PERSIAN GULF REGION	...	" "

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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PREFACE

THE creation of an independent state necessarily brings new responsibilities to the people who have been freed from foreign rule. One of these is eternal vigilance for the security of frontiers and inviolability of the territories. This involves, on the one hand, the establishment of strong defence forces and, on the other, the formulation of a foreign policy which is in harmony with the domestic needs and the genius of the people. India has regained her freedom and her people have now become the architects of their relations with the other peoples of the world. An enlightened realistic foreign policy demands an educated public opinion which is based on a scientific appreciation of the international problems, the spiritual concepts and historical tradition. In foreign policy, particularly, historical background is very important, for no nation can altogether ignore the past currents. To be able to frame an effective foreign policy now, the Indian people have to understand the trend of relationship of their country with other lands, mainly those of Asia on its frontiers.

The present work has been designed to serve this object by taking the attention back to a formative period of Indian history, wherein the problem of dealing with the countries on the borders came to the forefront. India was then part of the British Empire and, inevitably, Imperial interests governed the character of these relationships. In the mid-nineteenth century Asia was the field of conflict of interests between the empires of Britain and Russia. The danger of India being enveloped by the expanding Russian imperialism was entertained by many, and therefore, plans and means were devised to counteract it. Policies, forward or backward, were put forth, but whatever might have been the brand, these implied in essence the control of foreign relations of the neighbouring weak states of Central Asia, Afghanistan, Kalat and Sinkiang being the chief among them. This lasted till the beginning of the present century when the temporary settlement between England and Russia eased the tension between the rival imperialisms and thereby prepared the way for a reorientation of policy. In the period after the First World War, when organisations for international peace were devised. India's foreign relations transcended the immediate circle of neighbouring states and embraced a world field. But

not till 1947 were these policies in any manner independent of the policies or interests of the United Kingdom. However, Indian public opinion, and particularly the Indian National Congress, after 1930, grew interested in foreign affairs and certain fundamental principles emerged in that period which were likely to be reflected in the foreign policy as adopted after independence.

The Indian Council of World Affairs has planned to bring out a history of India's foreign relations beginning from the nineteenth century till the declaration of independence in 1947. The present volume is the first of this series and brings the story down to the year 1882, particularly in relation to the states towards the north-west of India. The subsequent three volumes will cover the remaining period. It is also proposed to publish the relevant documents separately so as to illustrate the account. For this reason no such documents have been included as appendices in this volume. The account is based primarily on the documents and records of the Foreign and Political Departments of the Government of India preserved in the National Archives. It is a very valuable source of information, authentic and practically full. I am indebted to the authorities of the National Archives for their courtesy in allowing me access to their records and permitting me to make use of them. I have also consulted books on the subject and one is surprised at the extent of such literature, largely contemporary and often reflecting the controversies which divided the leading statesmen and military authorities of the time in England or India. Some literature produced in Russia, but translated into English has also been made use of. But I have not been privileged to examine the official Russian archives, which, I was informed, have very valuable material on the varied aspects of Czarist expansion in Asia, and the Tashkand archives have particularly rich material on Central Asian affairs. It has also not been possible for me to have access to Afghan or persian sources of information. As such the story is largely built on the British Indian sources of information and in a study as the present one, which seeks to analyse the trends of Indo-British policies, the best sources naturally have to be these.

I am greatly indebted to my teacher, Dr. Tara Chand, India's Ambassador in Teheran, who read through the manuscript and made valuable suggestions for its improvement. I am also grateful to Dr. A. Appadorai, Secretary-General, Indian Council of World Affairs, for revising the manuscript. I must also express my gratitude to the Indian Council of World Affairs and Messrs. Orient Longmans Ltd., for undertaking to publish the book.

My only excuse in bringing out this book is to excite public opinion on foreign affairs, and I shall feel happy if the intelligentsia of the country is provoked to think on these matters.

University of Delhi
May 1955.

BISHESHWAR PRASAD

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

The first edition of this book was exhausted within a short time, and for many years the book has not been available in the market. I am glad to find that it has been in great demand by the students and others interested in the subject. This has encouraged me to seek its reprint. In this second edition, I have revised the text wherever necessary. In the interval since the publication of this book more than a decade back, some books have been published on the subject and a large amount of source material has also been made available. But I have not found reason to alter my conclusions, rather these have been confirmed.

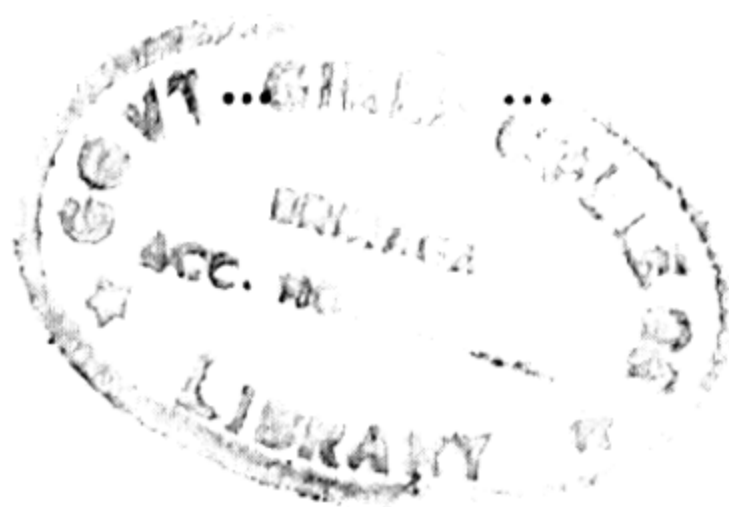
I trust the book will be found useful. I am grateful to Messrs Ranjit Printers & Publishers for undertaking to publish this edition.

University of Delhi
April, 1967.

BISHESHWAR PRASAD

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
PREFACE	
I THE BEGINNINGS IN CENTRAL ASIA ...	1
II RUSSIA IN CENTRAL ASIA UP TO 1875 ...	13
III 'MASTERLY INACTIVITY' ...	23
IV BUFFER STATES ...	41
V MAKRAN AND SEISTAN ...	52
VI KASHGAR ...	65
VII DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATIONS ...	83
VIII 'MERVIOUSNESS' ...	97
IX SHER ALI'S DESIRE FOR SECURITY ...	120
X BREACH WITH SHER ALI ...	145
XI THE ARBITRAMENT OF THE SWORD ...	180
XII POST-WAR SETTLEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN	209
XIII THE PERISAN GULF AND THE ARAB LITTORAL	233
XIV RETROSPECT ...	253
BIBLIOGRAPHY ...	265
INDEX ...	271



CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNINGS IN CENTRAL ASIA

IN the eighteenth century British dominion grew from a little speck on the sea coast into a big state embracing large portions of northern and southern India. Consciousness of their new role now dawned on the rulers of the East India Company and they looked with jealousy and alarm on every rival for supremacy, whether within or without the Indian frontiers. The Marathas and the Afghans naturally became the objects of their attention. The early years of the succeeding century brought the collapse of the offending Tipu, the end of the glory of the Marathas and the disruption of the Afghan power. The British empire in India virtually embraced the whole land up to the mountains, though in the north-west there subsisted for some time the independent state of Sind and the powerful kingdom of Ranjit Singh, with whom the British had an alliance. This expansion of British power and political influence in India brought new liabilities, for henceforth the defence of the frontier against rival European imperialisms or oft-recurring revolutionary turmoils in Central Asia became an inevitable responsibility.

It was not before the arrival of Lord Wellesley that the British rulers could look beyond the natural frontiers of India, as, till then, their vision was limited to the problems of self-preservation and internal expansion. That proconsul found on his arrival that Tipu had sent embassies to the Muslim courts of Asia, and that Zaman Shah, the ruler of Afghanistan, was threatening to advance into the heart of India from his base beyond the Satlaj. Zaman Shah gave notice of his intention to the Governor-General and, indeed, asked for his cooperation in driving the Marathas back into the Deccan. He was also conducting negotiations with the ruler of Oudh and other princes in Northern India. This new threat alarmed the Governor-General, and he resorted to a diplomacy which laid the foundations of a far-reaching policy in Central Asia.

Wellesley sought to counteract the Afghan danger by invoking Persian aid as a 'perpetual check' on the adventurous impulses of the ruler of Kabul. The efforts of his agent, Mehdi Ali Khan, combined with the expansionist ambitions of the Shah of Persia, led to an abortive expedition by Persian arms into

Khorasan, which had the effect of compelling Zaman Shah to retrace his steps back to Peshawar from Lahore.¹ The immediate danger passed away, never to recur as the fast succeeding palace revolutions in Kabul eliminated Afghanistan for many years as a threat to the security of India. The expulsion of Zaman Shah, then of Mahmud Shah and finally of Shah Shuja, in less than a quarter of a century all to find refuge as pensioners of the Indian Government, made the Kabul Government weak and eager to seek British support.

But while the Afghan threat was the original compelling motive for British contact with Persia and their interest in Central Asian affairs, the dominating factor which brought the Anglo-Indian government into the larger field of Asian affairs was the impending danger of French and Russian invasions of India which were believed to be in the offing. Napoleon Bonaparte, in the words of Sykes, wished to use "the Shah (of Persia) as an instrument in his scheme of world politics, more especially, in connexion with the invasion of India."² Moreover in 1800 an invasion was seriously contemplated by Paul of Russia, who had actually ordered his Cossacks to march on India, though the expedition stopped on the Volga when the Czar died. Napoleon's Egyptian adventure and his dazzling achievements elsewhere, combined with their ignorance of the geography of the barren Central Asian regions, dimmed the sense of proportion of the British rulers, and sitting as they were on the edge of a crater in India, their alarm was unbounded. Rapidly moving events further strengthened their fears. In 1802 overtures were made by French Consular agents to the Shah of Persia, and in 1804 a definite proposal was made for an alliance against Russia. This was followed by the despatch of a French envoy, M. Jaubert, to Teheran with more precise proposals, to the effect that on Persia renouncing British alliance and undertaking an invasion of India, the French army and subsidy would be available. These overtures bore fruit; the Shah, disappointed with the British, signed the Treaty of Frankenstein in 1807 and accepted a French military mission under General Gardanne, with seventy commissioned and non-commissioned officers, to train his army.³ To cap them all came the Treaty of Tilsit in 1807, and Napoleon and the Czar agreed that they would march to the east to dig out the very roots of British supremacy. These tornadic

1 Sykes, *History of Persia*, II pp. 298-300 ; Rawlinson, *England and Russia in the East*, pp. 5-7

2 Ibid., p. 300

3 Sykes, *History of Persia*, II, pp. 303-5

developments in the first decade of the nineteenth century soon passed away when Napoleon broke with the Czar, and the disaster in the steppes of Russia soon brought his meteoric career to a close. How far these wild dreams could have materialised is a moot question of history; the odds were against them, though the genius of Napoleon, the diplomatic situation in Central Asia, and the weak position of the British in India were strong factors conducive to their success.

These developments called for counter-action by the British and Indian governments, which were prone in this period to view with exaggerated fear every movement on the political horizon of Central Asia. Persia came to be closely identified with the security of British interests in India. With the first flutter, therefore, Malcolm was sent to Teheran in 1800 to contract engagements with the Shah with a view to the 'expulsion and extirpation' of the French if they sought to acquire a foothold on Persian soil. By his prodigal use of gold Malcolm succeeded in securing such an agreement. But the danger not materialising, for some years the affairs of Persia excited but little interest. The fervid appeals of the Shah for assistance against the Russians if they invaded the Persian country had no response, and the Shah was led to woo the French who sought his hand. But this attitude of sublime indifference could not long continue. After Tilsit, the alarm grew again, and then both the British and the Indian governments sent separate envoys to the court of Teheran. Malcolm was the first to arrive and was faced with the difficult problem of counteracting the French mission which was then basking in the sunshine of the Shah's favour. He failed in his mission and, returning to India, persuaded Minto to send a naval expedition against Kharak to avenge the dishonour. But before it could materialise, Malcolm's discomfiture was retrieved by Sir Hereford Jones, the British envoy, who in March 1809 concluded a Preliminary Treaty by playing on the Persian instinct of fear of the 'Northern Leviathan,' Russia. This agreement provided for "a British alliance together with an annual subsidy of 1,60,000 tomans (£ 120,000) so long as Great Britain continued to be at war with Russia and the services of British officers to train the Persian army."¹ This became the basis of the Definitive Treaty which was negotiated by Sir Gore Ousley and ratified in

1 For a detailed account of these negotiations and early relations, see Rawlinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-35. Rawlinson is right in emphasising that the earlier British relations with Persia were "based on two principal objects, the establishment of a counterpoise to the power of the Afghans, and the neutralization of French ambition, both the one and the other of these objects referring immediately to the defence of India." and that the "Russian element had hardly entered into the question," p. 29

1814.¹

The terms of this engagement, "which was specially declared to be defensive," were quite comprehensive. "All alliances between Persian and European nations hostile to Great Britain were made null and void, and all European armies were to be prevented from entering Persia, if hostile to Great Britain." Furthermore, the Shah was bound to induce the "rulers of Khwarazm, Tataristan, Bokhara and Samarcand" to oppose any armies crossing their territory on their way to the invasion of India. Mutual assistance against Russia was agreed to and the British Government undertook to determine the boundaries between Persia and Russia. The treaty further stipulated for the inclusion of Persia in any "treaty of peace between Great Britain and a European Power at war with Persia, failing which military and financial support was to be given." An interesting clause about Afghanistan was also there by which the British Government engaged "not to interfere in case of war breaking out between Persia and the Amir, whereas Persia, on her part, agreed to attack Afghanistan if it went to war with Great Britain." The subsidy was raised to 200,000 tomans and was to continue unless Persia launched out on aggressive war.²

This Treaty of Teheran gave a definitely anti-Russian trend to Britain's policy in Persia,³ which indeed was inevitable for with the extinction of the French Empire and the emergence of Russian supremacy in Eastern Europe, the only European power which could embark on a career of conquest in the east was Russia. Her old association with Central Asia and her steady move to the east threatened the equanimity of the British who, jealously guarding their possessions in India, were averse to any rivals to their design to exploit the commerce of Central Asia. Henceforth, the struggle lay between Britain and Russia for supremacy in Central Asia. The fear of Russian invasion of India, howsoever unreal, was genuine. Therefore

1 The Definitive Treaty was modified by the Treaty of Teheran, dated 25th November, 1814, which was concluded by Morier and Ellis, and was more liberal in its import. Rawlinson, p. 35

2 Sykes, op. II. Ch. LXXV., pp 39-10

3 Rawlinson writes, "Undoubtedly, the most important feature of the treaty in question was the principle which it involved, that Great Britain had a right to consider any spontaneous act of Russian aggression upon Persia as a demonstration against India." Particularly the 6th Article which provided "that although Great Britain might be at peace with Russia, if Persia were attacked by the latter power, and if our good offices failed in bringing about an arrangement of differences, then we should continue to pay the subsidy to support the army of the Shah." Rawlinson further writes, "We were in fact, by the 6th Article of the Treaty pledged to a possible war with Russia in defence of Persia," p. 37

the British and Indian governments, impelled by the sentiment of Russophobia, clutched at the intervening Asian kingdoms whose security from Russian domination was considered as the *sine qua non* of India's protection. Teheran, Herat and Kabul thus grew into prominent fields of Indo-British diplomacy.

Russian aggression against Persia had been continuing since the beginning of the century. A temporary settlement had been arranged by the British envoy in 1813 by the Treaty of Gulistan. Thereafter for a few years Persia enjoyed peace and British influence grew. But on the issue of Gokcha, which had been seized by Russia in 1825, and the failure of diplomacy to secure its restoration, public opinion in Persia was so excited that it led to hostilities against Russia. After initial successes, the Persian arms suffered disaster. Now came the time for testing the validity of the Treaty of Teheran, but the British Government was loath to render assistance, which was demanded under the treaty as Britain was then at peace with Russia. The war ended for Persia in the humiliating Treaty of Turkomanchai in 1828, by which she had to cede some of her fertile provinces and pay a huge indemnity of £ 3,000,000, besides agreeing to allow commercial privileges to Russia which amounted to extra-territorial rights. Sykes holds that henceforth Persia ceased to be an entirely independent power, and extra-territorial privileges were sought by other European nations. From the British point of view, this treaty had the effect of diminishing their influence at the court of Teheran. Another result was the diversion of Persian policy to the east directed towards the recovery of the provinces on the eastern frontier, which involved her in conflict with Herat and Afghanistan and introduced a new factor in British policy.¹

Herat henceforth became the objective of Persian activity. Attempts had been made in 1805 and 1818 to recover that province, but Firoz Mirza, its ruler, had staved off the disaster by a liberal use of gold.² After the defeats suffered at the hands of Russia, Persian arms under Abbas Mirza were directed to the restoration of the Shah's authority in the eastern provinces where elements of disaffection were in evidence. His successes in Yazd and Kerman were followed by action in Khorasan and Sarakhs, where his efforts were also crowned with success. Flushed with a victory which resounded through the whole of Central Asia, Abbas Mirza then turned to Herat. The Russians were prone to encourage his eastward drive for, firstly, it would diminish pressure on the Georgian region, and secondly, it would

1 Sykes, *History of Persia*, II, Ch. LXXVI

2 Ibid., p. 315.

lead indirectly to the establishment of Russian influence in the region of Afghanistan as a result of Persian victories. The British were placed in a dilemma. They could not afford to let the integrity of Herat, Kabul or Kandahar be violated by the Persians, for that would have brought them nearer to the frontiers of India, particularly when Russian influence was supposed to prevail in Teheran. At the same time they were not prepared to offend the Shah further and thus throw him absolutely into the arms of Russia.

The first siege of Herat in 1833 proved abortive as Kamran Mirza, the ruler, agreed to pay tribute to the Shah. In 1834, died Fateh Ali Shah, who had been friendly to the British, and to the throne of Persia came Muhammad Shah, believed to be entirely under Russian influence. The new Shah, on his retirement from Herat the previous year, had pledged himself to come back, hence he prepared a large force for the Herat campaign. Kamran had been guilty of a breach of faith and had even occupied Seistan, a coveted province of Persia. The British made strenuous efforts to dissuade the Shah from this enterprise, but failed. In 1837 the Shah laid siege to Herat, but the besieged resisted all attacks. The presence of an Englishman, Eldred Pottinger, with the garrison, is associated with the sturdy defence of the fortress against its assailants. British diplomacy was uneasy. Early in 1838 McNeill arrived in the Persian camp and "attempted to persuade the disheartened Shah to break off the siege". He was nearing success when, it is stated, the arrival of the Russian envoy, Count Simonich, with his offer of the services of a Russian officer, strengthened the determination of the Shah to pursue the siege. The British Government thereupon occupied Kharak Island, the news of which together with his inability to capture the city, as well as the definite tone of British representations, compelled the Shah to withdraw without entering into any agreement with the ruler of Herat. Thus ended the first phase of Persian endeavour to possess Herat, the charm of which continued to attract the attention of the Persian court till the fifties.¹ The Herat episode was the occasion for the first high-handed British interference in Afghanistan in the shape of the First Afghan War.²

The course of events for some years in Central Asia had made Anglo-Russian rivalry certain. In such circumstances, it was believed "that the true interest of England lay in preserving as far as possible the integrity of the Persian Empire, so

¹ Sykes, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 323-33.

² Compare Rawlinson : "The Khorasan campaign was the germ whence sprang our own Afghan war." p. 47, Sykes, p. 324.

as to keep it out of the hands of Russia, and free from her influence, in order to act as a barrier against any designs of encroachment eastwards which that Power might intrigue to carry into effect, either directly, or by putting forward Persia to promote her own ends, and to mask their real significance.”¹ For that, it was necessary to maintain British influence at the court of Teheran at least equal to that of Russia. But on the Herat issue no measures were of any avail and Russian influence outdistanced that of her rival. British opinion was alarmed and Russophobia caught the British statesmen in its grip, both in India and England. The progress of the siege of Herat by the Persian army with the assistance of the Russians, and the fear that on the fall of that city, Persian army under Russian instigation would move eastwards to conquer the whole of Afghanistan, heightened “the peril in the public estimation.” In this situation germinated the policy of “preserving the independence and securing the friendship of the Government of Afghanistan,” which henceforth continued to be the basis of British Central Asian diplomacy.

Before 1837, but for Elphinstone’s embassy to Kabul in 1809 when a Franco-Russian threat was believed to be imminent, the Government of India had taken little interest in the developments in Afghanistan. It had been content to see the strengthening of the kingdom of Ranjit Singh, and to pay stipends to every exiled ruler of Kabul. The situation in Kabul had also been stabilised with the accession in 1826 of Dost Muhammad Khan, who had been able to consolidate his position in the next ten years and had his proteges ruling in Herat and Kandahar. Dost Muhammad had genuinely desired friendship with the Government of India, owing to fear of Persia and Russia, but little effort was made in Calcutta to win his affection. His approaches on the question of the possession of Peshawar, which was under the suzerainty of Ranjit Singh, were lightly treated on the ground that the Government of India would not interfere with the affairs of an independent state. And later, when the Perso-Russian danger stared him in the face, Burnes, who had been sent by the Government of India to Kabul on a political—though seemingly economic—mission did not promise him any support. This mission, which had been intended to conciliate the rulers of Afghanistan so “as to secure their friendly co-operation in resisting the tide of Russo-Persian invasion,” failed as Burnes had no commission to make any substantial promises of assistance beyond assurances of sympathy. Dost Muhammad wanted tangible proof of friendship, for in a crisis such as he

¹ Trench, *The Russo-Indian Question*, p. 11.

was then facing, he could not be content with mere professions of goodwill. Disappointed, he gave ear to the Russian agent Vickovitch who was profuse in promises. It is believed that Dost Muhammad entered into a Russo-Persian alliance, and gave a handle to the Government of India to plan his ruin.

It is difficult to account for the behaviour of Auckland and the Board of Control in England. Undeniably they wanted to have a friendly, united Afghanistan which would be a bulwark against the rising tide of Russo-Persian ambitions. Dost Muhammad was the one person who gave the promise of fulfilling this object. Yet with him they were not prepared to form an alliance. The reason may, perhaps, be that his strength was distasteful to them, for they desired not an ally but a subordinate agent on the throne of Kabul. Or it may be that the fear of Ranjit Singh's adverse reaction deterred them from the most obvious course. There is no doubt that their sympathy for Shah Shuja, who was living in Ludhiana as their pensioner and protege and whose infirmity assured his complete dependence on British arms, deterred them from aligning with Dost Muhammad. Auckland, like his later disciple Lytton, did not want a buffer state; what he craved for was a subsidiary state whose policies, external and internal, were controlled by the Government of India. It was a repetition of the Indian example of subsidiary alliance which he desired, and seeing that Dost Muhammad, proud and brave as he was, would not reconcile himself to this humiliation, the British decided on helping Shah Shuja to the throne of Kabul. He had made an earlier attempt in 1834 with Indian gold, but was driven back. This time bayonets were added to gold, and at the moment when Russian danger had been eliminated by the Czar's government denouncing the activities of its agents, and the Persian threat was fast rolling back under the pressure of British demonstrations, Auckland, secure in the hope of victory, declared war on Kabul and sent the Indian armies to escort Shah Shuja to his ancestral throne.²

It is not necessary here to describe the war, which proved a

1 No definite evidence of any specific alliance is available.

2 Compare Rawlinson, "the war was not undertaken to avert the danger" from Persia, as also, "so entirely insufficient, indeed, do the ostensible grounds appear, which have been assigned for the prosecution of the Afghan War, after the danger which menaced India from the Russo-Persian movements had been dissipated by the retreat of Mohamed Shah's army from Herat, that we still cannot help suspecting, that it was owing to a great measure to the bureaucratic machinery of the Governor-General's camp, that the troops were finally set in motion." Rawlinson, p. 50, p. 60. For a detailed account of the Afghan War and the diplomacy leading to it, see Kaye, *The History of the Afghan War*, Vol 1.

costly but fruitless enterprise. The rising tide of Afghan nationalism roused by the foolish, supercilious and impolitic conduct of British officers and the cowardly subservience of Shah Shuja to every passing whim of his alien masters, swept away in 1840 the entire structure so assiduously built up by Auckland and company. Afghan temper made the experiment dangerous. Hence Ellenborough decided to withdraw the occupation forces after "avenging British honour by the infliction of some signal defeat upon the Afghans." The country was soon evacuated and the only "lasting impression of the might of Great Britain" was "the blowing up of the great Kabul Bazaar," a mere "act of petty vengeance and more calculated to arouse hatred than fear."¹ Dost Muhammad was restored to his throne and the *status quo* of 1835 was re-established. The only difference was that then Dost Muhammad was inclined to be friendly to the British, while in 1842 he was chagrined by their behaviour and was inclined to avenge his insult. For many years the relations between India and Afghanistan were non-existent and Dost Muhammad did not fail to assist the Sikhs in their war with the East India Company. Not till the early fifties was there a revival of Anglo-Indian interest in Central Asia.

British interference in Afghanistan had been occasioned by their appreciation of the importance of Herat. And it was on account of Herat that Indo-British interest revived in Central Asia. During the First Afghan War, the Government of India had sent Major D'Arcy Todd to Herat with the object of making a treaty with its ruler. Yar Muhammad Khan, the minister there, had encouraged this step by his congratulations to Shah Shuja upon his restoration to the Kabul throne. The mission was successful in the beginning and a treaty was made by which in return for a subsidy of twenty-five thousand rupees per month, the Herat ruler promised to carry on all intercourse with Persia through the British. But a faithful observance of these terms was impracticable, and Todd finding that Yar Muhammad had despatched a mission to Meshed, stopped the subsidy and broke off relations.² With the ignominious exit from Afghanistan in 1842, all intercourse with Herat was also discontinued for some years.

Nor were British relations with Persia very live or friendly. The bitterness of the frustration before Herat had not abated, but the internal difficulties of Muhammad Shah and his death in 1848 did not permit of any active developments. Yet Heart

¹ Noyce, *England, India and Afghanistan*, p. 28

² Sykes, *op. cit.*, pp. 335-6

remained the objective of Persian aspirations. The occasion arose in 1851 after the death of Yar Muhammad, when his son, with a view to strengthening his position at home, approached Persia offering to become its vassal. But British pressure soon frustrated Persian designs. In 1853 a treaty was imposed on the young Shah by which he "engaged not to send troops on any account to the territory of Herat, excepting when troops from without attack the place."¹ This declaration of the independence of Herat was unpalatable to the Shah who was prone to respond favourably to the Russian overtures made by Prince Dolgoruski, who desired Persian assistance against Turkey. The terms offered were tempting, for they held out promise of the seizure of Turkish territory and the remission of the balance of the Turkomanchai indemnity.² The minister, Sadr-i-Azam, however, opposed Russian alliance and induced the Shah to adhere to British friendship which could release him from the indemnity and bring back the lost provinces. The Shah's ardour was, however, damped by Britain's advice to remain neutral in the Russo-Turkish, or Crimean War. His annoyance was heightened by the high-handed conduct of Murray; and, as a result of this trifling incident, diplomatic relations were discontinued in 1855. Persia followed it up by marching her army into Herat in 1856, in defiance of the agreement of 1853, and took possession of the city in October. This action, though influenced by Russia, was in direct opposition to the policy and known wishes of the Indo-British governments.³

The Perso-Russian developments in the early fifties had equally affected the Indian and Afghan governments. In the face of the threatening attitude of Persia which made no secret of her desire to occupy Herat and Kandahar and thus menace the security of Kabul, and the expanding influence of Russia beyond the Syr Darya in Central Asia, Dost Muhammad thought it wise to veer round to his erstwhile enemy, the British rulers in India. Similarly, owing to the then undependable attitude of Persia and the open hostility of Russia, Lord Dalhousie thought it proper to rely on Afghanistan as a counterpoise. Dost Muhammad had strengthened his power by taking possession of Balkh and Kandahar, and had entrenched himself in Kabul. Afghanistan could therefore be a more effective block against Russian encroachments than Persia. Moreover, in Herat, Calcutta and Kabul had identity of interest; both were equally keen to prevent its falling under Persian control. If Herat was

1 Aitchison, *Treaties*, No. XVII, p. 71

2 See *ante*, p. 5.

3 Sykes, II, pp. 346-9

the key to the gate of India, it was more important for the safety of Dost Muhammad's possessions. This common objective led the governments of India and Kabul to sign the treaty of friendship at Peshawar in 1855. The agreement was general, vague, limited and one-sided. Lawrence and his government had not yet been able to shake off the fear engendered by the war of 1840, and considered "any entanglement in Afghan affairs, however slight, most undersirable."¹ Hence the treaty merely pledged the two to "perpetual peace and friendship" and mutual respect for the territories of each other and never to interfere therein. Dost Muhammad agreed to the additional stipulation of being the friend of the friends of the East India Company and the enemy of its enemies. This clause took away the character of reciprocity which is a guarantee of the loyalty of the parties. Nonetheless, Dost Muhammad was content with this treaty and most faithfully respected the contract. The Herat crisis in 1856 cemented the friendship further and led to an alliance, howsoever temporary, which was stipulated by the Treaty of 1857.²

The Persian invasion of Herat compelled the Government of India to take action, both direct and indirect. "The direct action was a declaration of war, most reluctantly made, by Great Britain against Persia."³ The indirect one was that of concluding a fresh agreement with Dost Muhammad in January, 1857. The terms of the second treaty were of temporary effect, for the duration of the war, and related to the subsidy and military advice to the Amir for the conduct of his war against Persia. A subsidy of one lakh of rupees per month for the war period, and the stationing of British officers in Afghanistan, outside Kabul, to direct military operations and to supervise the expenditure of money, were the two most important terms of this treaty. The only stipulation of post-war effect was the last, which provided for the appointment of an Indian agent at the court of Kabul.⁴

For the prosecution of war two alternative plans were considered. One was to send a force into Herat from India to fight alongside the Kabul forces, the other was to leave the fighting near Herat to Dost Muhammad but to exert pressure by naval and land action in the Persian Gulf. This second alternative

1 Noyce, p. 34

2 For the text of the two Treaties, see *Correspondence respecting the Relations between the British Government and that of Afghanistan*, pp. 1-2. (Parliamentary Paper 1878, C-2190).

3 Sykes, II, p. 349

4 *Correspondence Afghanistan*, 1878, p. 2

was adopted. The capture of Kharak and march on Bushire and Mohammara, with the Afghan pressure on Herat, compelled the Shah to sue for peace. Russia was not yet in a position to come to the help of Persia. Hence the Shah, fighting alone on two fronts, could not continue the fight longer. By the treaty which was signed in Paris in 1857, "the Shah agreed to evacuate Afghanistan and to recognize its independence," and to accept British arbitration in any conflict with Afghanistan before resort to arms.¹

This treaty brought better relations again between Persia and India. Herat was given to Sultan Ahmad Khan, a refugee nephew of Dost Muhammad, who agreed to acknowledge the formal suzerainty of the Shah. The new ruler of Persia kept himself away from the dominant influence of either Russia or Great Britain, as both the missions returned unsuccessful from his court in 1858. The most important result, however, was that henceforth the centre of political gravity shifted from Teheran to Kabul. The Government of India's new policy was that of treating Afghanistan as a buffer state whose integrity and friendship were essential in their long conflict with Russia directed towards the security of India and supremacy in Central Asia.

Thus was the Government of India involved in the affairs of Central Asia. The expanding empire of Russia in Central Asia was yet far from the frontiers of India, and it was not so much the fear of her contiguity as the prospect of her indirect pressure through Persia over Herat and Kandahar that Indian policy had got entangled in the affairs of Afghanistan. Largely that policy was built on vague fears, for in the early period full realisation of Russian conquest in Central Asia had not influenced Anglo-Indian diplomacy. Persia and Afghanistan were regarded as necessary bulwarks, and towards these all efforts of diplomacy were directed. While the vision of Anglo-Indian diplomacy was thus limited to these immediate neighbours, the Russian empire was making fast strides in Central Asia which created new problems and fresh fears for Indian policy in the subsequent period. Before we proceed further with the story of the Government of India's Central Asian policy it will be necessary to survey the rapid expansion of Russia which motivated it.

CHAPTER II

RUSSIA IN CENTRAL ASIA UP TO 1875

THE Russian movement to the east was initiated by Ivan III when in 1472 he conquered Perm and North Western Siberia. Fighting with the Tartar and Kirghiz hordes and defending their acquisitions, the Russians threw up a line of forts and a network of colonies of Cossacks or friendly tribes brought under protection, and by this strategy extended by degrees their territories so that within fifty years of their appearance to the east of the Urals, they had been successful in incorporating the whole of Northern Asia as far as Kamtchatka which was annexed in 1697. This brought the whole of Siberia under Russian occupation. Yet for a long time the move into Central Asia was not undertaken.

Terentyef, describing the process of Central Asian conquests, ascribes it to "sheer necessity" or the inexorable law of "historical necessity." He writes, "sheer necessity forced us to plant settlements on the furthestmost limits of our possessions and indeed experience has abundantly proved that the natural path to the security of our eastern frontier lies forward. History has ordained that we should advance, although in so doing we have invariably acted with reluctance and the incursions of the nomad tribes have been the immediate cause. In this contest with the historical necessity of a perpetual advance is contained the whole interest of our Central Asian movement."¹ The weak, materially backward tribes living on the frontiers of civilised powerful states, or the militarily backward oriental states, resisting the rapid advance of western imperialisms, have always afforded a pretext to the latter to annihilate or absorb them, impelled either by motives of self-protection or in the interest of humanity and civilisation. This inevitable law of "historical necessity" compelled "reluctant" and apparently "undesigned" movements of the British and Russian empires in Asia, and as their expanding glacies approached nearer, engendered jealousy and conflict between them, which had further repercussions on the freedom of the Asian peoples.

During the period that England was building her empire in India extending towards the north-west, Russian expansion eastwards started from four points. After early discomfiture in Central Asia in the eighteenth century, Russian aggression was

1 Terentyef, *Russia and England in Central Asia*, I, pp. 13-14.

directed towards the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea which brought her into conflict with Persia. The long resistance of the tribes in the Caucasus and the growing opposition of England prevented further expansion in that region. Caucasia was incorporated, but beyond establishing a naval station at Ashourada in the south-eastern Caspian no further advance was made in that direction. Astrabad could not become the base for eastern movement. Advance into Central Asia, however, came from three other points. These were Orenburg on the Aral Sea in the west and Semipalatinsk in the east, and later from Alexandrovski and Krasnovodsk on the Caspian. This three-pronged attack on the Khanates of Khokand, Bokhara and Khiva and the nomad hordes of Kirghizia and Turkistan brought the whole of Central Asia, up to the frontiers of Afghanistan and Persia, under Russian rule. The advance was rapid, resistance was weak, and thus became a constant source of anxiety to the British and Indian governments and their allies in Asia.

Terentyef gives an explanation for this eastward move of Russia. According to him it was the necessity of finding "some definite line of boundary formed by nature (such as mountains, rivers, etc.) for their Siberian possessions to protect their settlements, latitudinally weak, from the incessant devastations by the nomadic robber hordes, which prompted advance to the Syr Daria and the Chu, the only natural barriers available." Earlier attempts to subdue the Kirghiz by means of flying detachments had failed to secure the object. Then it became clear to the Russian authorities in the early forties "that neither flying detachments nor measures either of kindness or severity, nor the exercise of diplomacy could effect the entire subjugation of the Kirghiz, so long as their summer and winter pastures were not in our hands."¹ Hence was adopted the system of encircling "the Kirghiz by a chain of forts." The beginning of this process was made with the mouth of Syr Daria on the Aral. In 1845 were built the forts of Orenburgsk on the River Turga and of Uralsk on the Irjiz. In 1847 came the fort of Aralsk at the mouth of the Syr Daria. "In 1848 the fort of Karabutak was built for the purpose of securing communication between the Uralsk fort and the regular line, and also that of Koo-Aral on the Sea of Aral for the protection of a private company started for fishery purposes." "This continuous belt of forts" brought an end to Kirghiz incursions. But the occupation of the mouth of the Syr Daria naturally alarmed the Khanates of Khiva, Bokhara and Khokand. While Bokhara

¹Terentyef, I, p. 24.

remained peaceful, the other two are alleged to have incited the Russian Kirghiz and made incursions into Russian territory. This situation led the Russian Governor-General of Orenburg, Perovski, who had been unsuccessful in his advance on Khiva in 1839, to occupy the fort of Ak-Masjid in 1853. "In this way the first step was taken by the Russians to establish communication between the Orenburg and Siberian lines."¹

For a few years no further progress was made owing to the Crimean War. The Khokandians also remained quiet after their failure to recapture Ak-Masjid, and for seven years no serious activity was evident. Meanwhile four forts had been built on the Syr Daria in support of Ak-Masjid, and the line up to that point had been stabilised. The capture of Ak-Masjid is an important landmark in the history of Russian advance in Central Asia. It remained for eight years the extreme point reached by them. During this period the Russian policy "was not so much to assert her supremacy as a paramount power as to appear as the protector of the Kirghizes against the oppression of the Khokandee Governors, and thus they were assisted in all their operations by the Kirghiz tribes in the neighbourhood."²

The next step was taken on the Siberian side. The pursuit of the Kirghiz of the Middle and the Great Hordes brought the Russians to Lake Balkash and beyond to the Ala Tau mountains and Lake Isikkul. In 1854 Fort Vernoe was founded there and became the base for further advance westwards. In 1860 the Khokandians attacked Kastek, south of Lake Balkash, but were defeated. At the same time Colonel Zimmerman took the forts of Tokmak and Pishpik, on the other side of the River Chu. On his return he was pursued by a large hostile force which was defeated at Uzun-Agach. By 1863, the pincer had attained Ak-Masjid and Jutek on the west, and Tokmak, Mask, Pishpen and Anhata on the east. At that time the target was an advance to the "the northern declivity of the range of the Karatau mountains above the towns of Tashkent and Turkistan."³ The settlement of this new frontier was soon effected. The pincer moved from the two ends; the western one captured Suzak, Chulak-Kurgan and Azreb-Turkistan; while the eastern came up to the important town of Chamkend which was occupied. By these successes the Karatau Range was left behind and the valleys of the Chu and

1 Terentyef, I, p. 28; also Venicikof and Valikhanof (Trans. Mitchell). *The Russians in Central Asia*, vii, ix and x.

2 *Memorandum on the Position of Russia in Central Asia*. S.I. Progs. 1869, No. 65. This Memorandum was drawn up under the orders of the Government of India to give an account of the developments in Central Asia.

3 Terentyef, I, p. 32

Syr Daria were largely held. Next came the turn of Tashkand which was taken by storm on 15th June, 1865, and then fell Khojend in 1866. The conquest of these two important cities of Khokand sealed the fate of that state and brought the Russians in full control of the Syr Daria line. Henceforth Khokand ceased to be an effective factor in Central Asian politics. The Treaty of 1868 made that kingdom, in its attenuated size, a mere subsidiary vassal of the Russian empire.

In December 1867 a treaty of commerce was presented to the Khan of Khokand, which he was compelled to sign and ratify in April 1868. The attitude of General Kaufmann, the Russian Governor-General, was one of firmness, and behind the sweet words of friendship was the resolve to use force if the object was not achieved. The Khan realised his helplessness, and after his stratagem to have direct dealings with the 'White Czar' had failed, as also the excuse of his inability to secure the life and property of the Russians owing to the wild nature of his subjects, he ratified the treaty and sent his ring as a token of friendship to the Governor-General. The treaty was one of commerce and comprised five articles. These related to the right of the Russian merchants to visit all the towns of the Khanate, establish caravanserais there and appoint their commercial agents. There was to be no discrimination in the matter of import duties between Russian and Muslim merchants; and the Russian caravans on their way to the neighbouring states were to be allowed unrestricted passage through the state of Khokand.¹

By this commercial treaty the Russians were to pay only a duty of 2½ per cent, the same as charged from the Muslims, and thus acquired a preferential treatment in relation to other foreigners. Their right to visit all towns, and have their commercial agents as well as unrestricted passage to the other states, not only gave a filip to their trade, but opened out the whole of the Khanate to them. Khokand virtually became the stepping stone for commercial—and even political—expansion beyond. The Khante had been shorn of half its territories, while the other half was also placed in dependence on Russia. This progress had resulted from the law of "inexorable necessity" which had prompted the Russians, in self-protection or as the protectors of the nomadic Kirghiz, to drive the Khokandians beyond the natural frontier of the Syr Daria and Karatau.

It has been stated by General Romanofski that all fighting up to the capture of Chamkend in 1864, had taken place "in fulfilment of a scheme of annexation, which the Russian Government had for a long time previously contemplated and resolved

¹ Terentyef, I, pp. 127-8

to carry out. The object of this project was to connect, by a continuous frontier line, the extreme flanking portions of the Russian territory in Central Asia, so as to leave no interval of independent country between. The two points which it was thought desirable to connect were Fort Perofski in the west and Fort Vernoe in the east."¹ But when this line was attained, the temptation to command the resources of the fertile district beyond, "the granary of all the country between the Tchur and the Syr Daria," as well as the requirements of rectification of the frontier led them to the occupation of Tashkand and Khojend, for which an excuse was provided by the aggressive intentions of the hostile Khokandians, the original occupants. Meanwhile, to silence the critics in England and other European countries, Prince Gortchakoff had issued a circular in 1864, a document pre-eminently for foreign consumption, indicating the reluctance of the Czar's government to acquire more territory in Central Asia and assuring no further advance.² Soon after was also announced the creation of the province of Turkistan, of which Tashkand became the capital. These measure of consolidation and ostensible appeasement soon, however, proved a mere screen for the succeeding steps of conquest which brought the Russian empire in close contact with Bokhara and Khiva, which were the next victims of the steam-roller. These new strides aroused the British and Indian governments which could no longer maintain that indifference to Central Asian developments which had been exhibited in denying all assistance to Khokand, in spite of her repeated approaches to India in the decade prior to 1865.³

The fate of Khokand must have alarmed the Amir of Bokhara, who is reported to have called for a *jehad* against the Russians. His first combat with the Russian forces came in 1866 when he was defeated at Irjar. This humiliation seems to have disheartened him and though the Mullahs were active in rallying Muslim national sentiment and the merchants had contributed funds for the war, he was exhibiting dilatoriness and was carrying on negotiations for peace. A treaty was arranged, accepted by the Czar's government, signed by the Governor-General and sent to him for ratification. The draft treaty was

1 Trench. *The Russo-Indian Question*, p. 54

2 The text of this circular, dated November 9 (21) 1864, is given by Frederick von Hellwall in *The Russians in Central Asia*, pp. 139-45.

3 Pol.A.Progs, February, 1865. Nos. 151-5

An envoy was sent by the King of Khokand to the Viceroy in India as late as 1865, asking for the despatch of some experienced artillerymen. but Lawrence expressed his inability to render him any assistance.

largely commercial in its aspects, but the Amir was putting off the signature. Meanwhile an opposition was reported to be gathering in Bokhara against the Russians and attempts were being made to create a universal coalition of the Muslim states of Kashgar, Khokand, Khiva and Afghanistan. General Kaufmann was intent on the treaty, to secure which he did not hesitate to use force. Action followed leading to the capture and occupation of Samarkand, the summer capital of Bokhara, in May 1868. The district of Zarafshan was also occupied, and then negotiations were started. It is stated that the Russian Governor-General was inclined for moderation and even prepared to restore the Samarkand territory under conditions to the Amir, if he accepted the treaty. Negotiations, however, did not bear fruit, and early in June, there was a simultaneous attack by Bokharan troops and their allies, the neighbouring Begs, on the Russians in Katta-Kurgan and Samarkand. Within a few days the 'insurgents' were vanquished and the Amir suffered severe discomfiture. Talks were renewed for accommodation on the basis of the terms previously offered. It is stated by Terentyef that on 12th June, the Amir, in great despair, sent a letter submitting a "request that we would accept his capitulation together with that of his remaining troops and guns, and that he might be allowed a personal interview with the Emperor to pray for permission to withdraw to Mecca."¹ But Kaufmann proved to be an embodiment of forbearance and assured the Amir that he had no intention of annihilating the Khanate of Bokhara, and that the Amir might proclaim peace, accept the treaty, and retain his army which might be useful in repressing his disobedient son. Terentyef is intrigued by this magnanimity. It is difficult to account for it, unless it be that Kaufmann, who was acting in defiance of the avowed policy of the Imperial Government, shrank from taking a step which must have had serious international repercussions.

The circumstances were favourable for the treaty, which, with necessary modifications, was signed by the Amir on 23rd June, 1868. This Treaty of Peace provided for the incorporation of Samarkand and Katta-Kurgan (the whole district of Zarafshan) into the Russian territory, demarcation of boundaries and payment of an indemnity of 5,00,000 roubles, in addition to the clauses relating to commerce. The Amir soon after had need for Russian help against his son, who was in rebellion and was receiving support from the disaffected Begs. Russian military action reduced the Prince to submission and the authority of the Amir was restored. The Khanate of Bokhara also became

¹ Terentyef, I, p. 62

a vassal of Russia now and, even when Khiva was annexed in 1873, no rumblings of hostility were heard. Later the incorporation of Khivan territory on the right bank of the Amu (Oxus) necessitated a rectification of the boundary with Bokhara. The Treaty of 1868 was therefore revised and renewed on 10th October, 1875. The treaty stipulated for the protection of caravan routes and navigation of the Amu by Russian steamers and other vessels. The Russians had also the right to construct piers and storehouses in Bokhara territory on the Amu, the protection and safety of which was the responsibility of Bokhara. As in the Khokand treaty, the treaty with Bokhara also provided for the opening of all the towns and villages of Bokhara to Russian commerce, which was to pay only a duty of $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent *ad valorem*. At the same time Bokhara territory could be used for free transit of Russian goods. The Russians had the right to maintain commercial agents and caravan serais in all towns. Moreover, it was stipulated that the Russian subjects would enjoy "equality of rights with Bokhara subjects in carrying on in Bokhara territory all branches of industry and handicraft allowed by the law of Shariat." They could also own property in Bokhara. There were also clauses relating to the entry of Russian subjects into Bokhara on a permit granted by the Russian authorities, and about extradition. Bokhara had the right to maintain an envoy at Tashkand. The Amir prohibited slavery. Reciprocal trade rights were admitted for Bokhara subjects in the Russian territory.¹

This treaty as well as that with Khokand had assured Russia of an economic hold over these Khanates and had provided for extensive extra-territorial rights therein. The conclusion of these treaties gives to the Russian expansion a commercial colour, though it cannot be denied that territory was an important consideration. British trade had already invaded the Central Asian markets and if it was not checked Bokhara and her neighbours might have fallen under that influence. The fear of the British flag following the trade might have influenced Russia in strangling the independence of Bokhara and Khokand and thereby destroying all chances of the British acquiring even an economic foothold in Central Asia. By 1878 there was no doubt left of Russia's predominance in Central Asia along the River Oxus, the right bank of which up to its mouth became entirely subject to her when in 1873 Khiva fell to Russian arms.

The heart of Central Asia had been acquired but the two

¹ *Memorandum on the Position of Russia in Central Asia*, S I. Prog., 1869 No. 65; Terentyef, I. Ch ii; Krausse, *Russia in Asia*, pp. 70-71. Hellwall, Ch. ix and x.

flanks still remained unconquered. In the east and south-east lay Zungaria and Kashgaria which were subject to Chinese suzerainty, while to the west were the Khanate of Khiva and the Turkoman territory which, situated within the vast barren steppes, Kizil Kum and Kara Kum, were helped by nature to defy hostile encroachments. Russian activity was, however, soon directed in both these directions. Developments in the east were assuming a threatening aspect and demanded prior attention. But before action was taken there Kaufmann could not afford to leave Khiva to create trouble in the rear. In 1869 was built the fort of Krasnovodsk on the Caspian as a base for expeditions into Khiva, and in 1870 the order was given to march without delay against that city. The Turkomans were stirred into rebellion against the Khan and a force marched through the desert. But in 1872 it met with a severe repulse. Russia could not be daunted by this reverse; Kaufmann then organised a fresh expedition, the forces marching from three sides, Tashkand, the Caspian and Fort No. 1 on the Aral Sea, drawn from Orenburg. This expedition was bound to arouse British misgivings, hence Count Schuvaloff was sent to England to assure Lord Granville that the sole object of the expedition was "to punish acts of brigandage, to recover fifty Russian prisoners, and to teach the Khan that such conduct on his part could not be continued with impunity." Annexation of Khiva was declared to be against the intentions of the Czar and it was stated that positive orders had been given against such a course, even prolonged occupation being forbidden. The British Government was satisfied, and Khiva, after heavy slaughter of the Turkomans, was humbled in March 1873. The Khan had struggled hard to secure aid from India or Persia but in vain. The treaty which followed on 10th June, 1873, led to the cession of all territory on the right bank of the Oxus, payment of a huge indemnity of 2,200 000 roubles, exemption of Russian trade from customs duty, and "the relegation of the Khan to the position of a dependent of the Tsar."¹

The next victims were the Tekke Turkomans who inhabited the Atrek Valley and the Sarakhs of Merv which barred the passage to Herat. Their subjugation was deemed essential to bring the Russian possessions up to the Caspian and thus secure direct contact with Russia. But this development came after 1875 and will be discussed in a later chapter. Meanwhile, as a result of the surrender of Khiva, and possibly under the instigation of Yakoob Beg of Kashgar, a hostile movement was gathering strength in Khokand, the preliminary object of which

¹ Krausse, p. 77; Terentyef, Ch. v and vi.

was to drive Khudayar Khan, the weak but oppressive ruler, from the throne. On his return from Khiva, Kaufmann found Khokand in the throes of a rebellion headed by Nasiruddin, the son of the Khan. Khudayar had taken refuge in Tashkhand. His son offered to live in peace with Russia, but meanwhile a religious war had been proclaimed against her. The Russian army re-occupied Khojend after a stubborn resistance, and then Kaufmann marched into Khokand which was occupied. Strong bodies of troops had also to be sent against the regions of Marghilai, Namanga and Andijan, and only after considerable effort was the whole of the territory subdued. This event led to the absorption of the Khanate of Khokand on March 2, 1876, as a part of the Russian empire.

The eastern area, Zungaria, Kulja, Kashgar and Yarkand had attracted Russian attention early but beyond a treaty with China relating to trade with Zungaria and Kulja, and the sending of caravans there, no further progress had been made in that direction. The river Naryn, forming the boundary, had been surveyed, the highlands had been visited, and embassies had been sent to Kashgar; but no further step was taken before 1875. Meanwhile Yakoob Beg had entrenched his position in Kashgar and Yarkand, and in Zungaria and Ili also, Muslim influence had increased. This factor betokened further advance on that side.

Yakoob Beg had become master of the whole of Kashgaria by 1867 and, soon after, according to Russian sources, had evinced signs of hostility to the Russians, by placing stringent restrictions on their trade, by aligning himself with Bokhara in an effort to organise a united front against Russia and by advancing against Adraimchi in Kulja in defiance of the Russian treaty with China. His friendly approaches to India were also resented by the Russian Governor-General. As early as 1869, Kaufmann determined to bind Kashgar also in an alliance similar to that with Bokhara or Khokand and proposed a treaty of commerce on the same lines. Negotiations were protracted and in the interval Yakoob made war on the Dungans in 1870. Turfan fell to him, and it was feared that Yakoob might direct his arms against the Taranchees and Kulja and thence to the province of Ili. The Russians had already built the fort of Naryn, and as a precautionary measure they occupied the Muzart Pass and anticipated the Kashgarians by taking Kulja. Simultaneously offers of assistance were made to Khudayar Khan for subjugating Kashgar, particularly as there were clear indications of its alignment with the English. But Khudayar Khan was irresolute and timorous and "could

not be used as an instrument for the punishment of Yakoob Beg." Hence the alternative of peaceful approach was made, but the agency of Khudayar Khan naturally offended Yakoob and little profit came by it. In 1872 Baron Kaulbars was sent to Kashgar and on 10th June, 1872, a treaty was signed, which differed in no way from those concluded with Bokhara and Khokand. Ostensibly Kashgar was also brought "within the sphere of Russian political influence." But this success was ephemeral for in 1873 when Mr. Douglas Forsyth from India went to Kashgar on a second visit, Yakoob was loud in proclaiming his allegiance to the Queen of England and reimposed the old restrictions on Russian trade. He also signed a formal treaty with India on 12th February, 1874. The Russian apple-cart was thus upset in that direction, but there could be no doubt of Kashgar being their objective against which diplomacy or force was to be employed to extend the zone of Russia's political and commercial influence right up to the borders of India.¹

From all the four corners, thus, Russian territory and political influence developed so as to envelop the whole of Central Asia, Russian territory, directly or indirectly, was contiguous with the Oxus and touched the boundaries of Afghanistan, but for the vassal state of Bokhara which was the immediate neighbour of the Afghan state. The move against Khiva, the progress of arms against the Turkomans directed ultimately against Merv, and the thinly veiled attempts against Kashgar, naturally created apprehensions in Kabul, the ruler of which had reason to be afraid owing to the hospitality which had been offered by Kaufmann to Abdur Rahman. Russia by her position of vantage in Central Asia was well poised to threaten the integrity of Afghanistan and to be in a position to menace the security of the outer defences of India. Possible moves in the direction of Herat and Kashgar-Yarkand, likely approaches to bring Kabul within the sphere of Russian influence, and the consolidation of the Russian hold in Central Asia which would expel British commerce from those lands and prevent for ever all chances of its entry there, created alarm in England and encouraged Russophobia which was reflected in the policy of the Indian Government. But in the period before 1875, the consciousness of danger had not been acute, hence the Government of India was able to pursue a policy of peaceful action directed towards eliminating conflict with Russia by creating a belt of neutral territory between the two empires.

¹ Terentyef. I, Ch. VIII.

CHAPTER III

“MASTERLY INACTIVITY”

IN the early stages of gradual but persistent advance of Russian arms in Central Asia least ripple seems to have been caused in the placid diplomacy of the Anglo-Indian governments. The British Foreign Office was easily satisfied with the overt motives of Russian action “and the reception accorded to Prince Gortchakoff’s circular of 1864 was one of friendly toleration.”¹ Ignorance of geography, the magnitude of distance and inadequate appreciation of the character of Russian movement against the Central Asian Khanates dulled the sense of danger and prevented alarm. Till the conquest of Tashkand and the subjugation of Bokhara the sense of political jealousy was not activated. The commercial mind, however, did not fail to appraise the situation. The loss of Central Asian markets which were attracting British manufactures, though not considerably, was feared and this mercantile interest, as in 1838-39, began slowly to influence the voice of opposition to Russia and demanded effective measures to check her further advance. The rapid political and territorial expansion of Russia after 1865 helped to create alarm also in some military circles in England and India as they grew conscious of the strategic implications of her acquisitions and bases beyond the Oxus. These feelings found expression in the Press and a few memoranda were presented to the Government also. In these a peculiar solicitude for Afghanistan was the basic consideration. India’s policy towards her immediate neighbours to the north-west came for review in the late sixties, and Sir John Lawrence, the Governor-General of India, employed the opportunity to essay it and to indicate the lines which determined that policy till 1875.

Lawrence had negotiated the treaties of 1855 and 1857 with Dost Muhammad. He had met the Amir, had known his intentions, and by reason of his long tenure of the government of the Panjab had acquired an insight into the Afghan character. The lesson of the First Afghan War had not been lost on him, and he was fully convinced of the dangerous consequences of meddling with the independence of Afghanistan and interfering in her internal affairs. He was loyal to the wish expressed to him by Dost Muhammad in 1857 “that we should not interfere

1. Krausse, p 226.

in their (Afghan) quarrels, but should allow them to manage their own concerns and to fight and settle domestic broils, in their own way. The Chiefs and people of Afghanistan, he assured me, one and all, mainly dreaded and would always most strongly resent our interference in such affairs."¹ The basis, therefore, of his policy was friendship with the ruler of the country without involving the Government of India in any commitments, absolute non-interference in the internal affairs of that state, and positive embargo on the entry of any Englishman on Afghan soil. He adhered to the Treaty of 1855 but was not prepared to read anything more in it than the words expressed.

Lawrence's relations with Dost Muhammad continued to be friendly and as long as the Amir lived there was no doubt of the integrity and independence of Afghanistan. With the inclusion of Herat and Kandahar, the Kabul Government was strengthened and fully blocked all approaches to India from beyond in the north and the west. The engagement of 1855, therefore, was adequate for the security of India and in the maintenance of the existing policy was a pledge for future strength and stability. The death of the valiant Amir in 1863, however, created a new situation. The throne of Kabul became the bone of contention between his sons, Afzal Khan, Azim Khan and Sher Ali. A civil war ensued which rent the country for the next six years. The Government of India had to define their policy in that situation. Sher Ali first came to the throne and informed Lord Elgin, the Governor-General, of the change of ruler. Elgin decided to wait till things had settled in Kabul. Meanwhile, his death "prevented his taking the necessary steps to acknowledge Dost Muhammad's successor formally."² Sir William Denison, the acting Governor-General, pending the arrival of Lawrence, wrote a courteous letter to Sher Ali accepting him as ruler of Kabul. Sher Ali was opposed by his two brothers, Afzal and Azim, but he managed to maintain a precarious hold on the throne for about three years. His defeat in May 1866 at Shakabad, however, altered the situation. Sher Ali was driven out of Kabul and later had to evacuate Kandahar; Afzal became the ruler. Lawrence had then occasion to apply his policy. He recognised Afzal as Amir of Kabul and later of Kandahar, but continued at the same time to give recognition to Sher Ali as ruler of the territories he held, viz. Herat.³

1. Lawrence's Minute, 25th Nov., 1868, Pol. A. Progs., Jan., 1867, No. 57.

2. Noyce, p. 41

3. For the varying fortunes of the civil war and the successive modulations of British policy see Dharm Pal : Administration of Sir John Lawrence in India, Chapter VIII.

Prior, to Sher Ali's disaster, Lawrence in his letter of 21st April, 1866 to Lord Ripon, the Secretary of State, outlined his attitude to the Afghan tangle. He wrote: "We have communicated to the Lieutenant-Governor (Panjab) our view as to the policy by which the relations of the British Government with the contending factions in Afghanistan should be regulated. The cause of Amir Sher Ali is by no means finally lost, and we consider that until such a result is reached, we are bound equally by good faith and by considerations of policy to recognize no other chief as Amir of Afghanistan. Should the present contest terminate in a disruption of the kingdom into two or more principalities, it would be time enough to give these our recognition when they develop themselves in a form having some appearance of stability. In the meantime, we intend maintaining an attitude of strict neutrality leaving the Afghans to choose their own rulers, and are prepared to accept with amity whatever chief may finally establish his power in the country."¹ The policy was stated by him to be: "To show clearly that we will not interfere in the struggle, that we will not aid either party, that we will leave the Afghans to settle their own quarrels and that we are willing to be on terms of amity and goodwill with the nation and with the rulers *de facto*."²

True to this policy, Lawrence had conferred *de facto* recognition on each prince who came to the fore on each turn of the wheel, and did not hesitate to recognize even more than one ruler at the same time as they held slices of the country. But such an attitude was only relative and was conditioned by the parties fighting their battles alone, unaided by any foreign power. This is illustrated by his letter to the Secretary of State: "Whatever happens, we contemplate no divergence from our settled policy of neutrality, unless indeed Sher Ali or any other party should throw themselves into the hands of Persia and obtain assistance from the Shah. Our relations with Afghanistan remain on their first footing of friendship towards the actual rulers, combined with rigid abstention from interference in domestic feuds."³ When, therefore, there was apprehension that Sher Ali would seek assistance from Persia, the Governor-General was prepared to modify his policy so as to be able "to openly assist the party in power at Kabul, if at the time being this party should appear to be in a condition likely, with such assistance, to hold its position against Amir Sher Ali.

1 Correspondence Afghanistan, 1878, pp. 8-9

2 Letter to Panjab Government, 17 April, 1866, Ibid p. 9

3 Letter to Secretary of State, 20 June, 1867, Correspondence Afghanistan, 1878, pp. 16-18

Our aid would be confined to a moderate subsidy of money and a supply of arms and accoutrements. The moral and material help thus rendered would go a great way to give the party at Kabul, in such active alliance with ourselves, a clear and unassailable supremacy."¹ In essence, therefore, the policy at the time was to have relations with "the *de facto* ruler of the day, and so long as the *de facto* ruler is not unfriendly to us we should always be prepared to renew with him the same terms and favourable conditions as obtained under his predecessors."² "In this way," he held, "we shall be enabled to maintain our influence in Afghanistan far more effectually than by any advance of our troops—a contingency which could only be contemplated in the last resort, which would unite the Afghan tribes against us, and paralyse our finances."³

It has been necessary to quote at length the statements of policy of Sir John Lawrence, because his views regulated the course of action for some years. The British Government had given their support and approval to this policy. The Secretary of State wrote to him: "It is the desire of H.M.'s Government not to interfere in the internal conflicts of the Afghans, so long as they do not jeopardize the peace of the frontier, or lead to the formation of engagements with other powers dangerous to the independence of Afghanistan, which it long has been and still is the main object of our policy in that part of the world to maintain."⁴ This as the Duke of Argyll has pointed out was not "a policy of absolute or unconditional abstention in Afghanistan".⁵

Lawrence's policy of neutrality in the Afghan conflicts presupposed complete isolation of that country and the preparedness of the parties to carry on the contest without external assistance. It also presumed the adherence of every contestant ultimately to British friendship, as contained in the stipulations of 1855. Any change in the premises was bound to affect the integrity of this policy, and both the Government of India and Her Majesty's Government made no secret of it. It will be futile here to speculate on the reasons which determined Lawrence's policy. The horrid aftermath of Auckland's action, trust in the wisdom of Dost Muhammad's opinion, ignorance of the Afghan situation, or imperfect appreciation of the Russian

1 Letter to Secretary of State, 3 Sept., 1867, *Ibid.*, pp. 18-21

2 *Ibid.*

3 Letter to Secretary of State, 3 Sept., 1867.

4 Letter from Secretary of State to Governor-General, 26 Dec., 1867, *Correspondence Afghanistan 1878* pp. 24-26

5 Argyll: *The Eastern Question*

position, might have, one or all, influenced his attitude. It is clear that in this policy little allowance had been made for the Russian moves beyond the Syr Daria, which were not very alarming till 1866. At the same time, the danger of any one of the parties demanding aid from Persia was not overlooked. In such an eventuality, the Government of India was prepared to counteract it by aiding the other party in possession of Kabul. Lawrence, it may be said, was prepared to watch the game in the ring, but only so long as the rules of the duel were truly adhered to. His neutrality had reference only to the contest between the parties in Afghanistan and did not by any means extend to a disinterested observation of the foreign influence, whether of Persia or Russia, being established in that country. The independence of Afghanistan and her rigid adherence to the terms of friendship with the Government of India were the fundamentals of his policy. One danger, however, was inherent in such a policy that the civil war might have led to the division of the country and thereby its integrity, which was essential for India's security and might have been destroyed. That no such development occurred was fortunate for Lawrence.

Such a policy of non-intervention was followed not only in the case of Afghanistan but also in respect of the other states of Central Asia which considered themselves threatened by Russia aggressive policy. Sir John Lawrence was not prepared to give any help to them. Thus when in 1864 the Khan of Khokand despatched an envoy to the Government of India with two letters, one for the Queen and the other for the Viceroy, and asked to be sent to him “as many experienced artillerymen and instructors as possible,” in consideration of his friendship with the British Government, the Viceroy declined to render him aid as his territories were “too remote to admit of British interference.”¹ The same thing was reiterated by Lawrence in his letter to the Khan on 21st February, 1865.² Similar treatment was accorded to the envoy from Bokhara whom the Amir despatched in November, 1866 with letters applying for assistance against Russia. Lawrence, it is reported, “gave the envoy good advice but declined to give assistance on the same grounds that he refused Khokand.”³ This attitude was maintained towards all the states of Central Asia as is evident from the later treatment of the envoys of Khiva and Kashgar. Even the Shah of Persia was not encouraged “to

1 Pol. A. Progs., Feb., 1865, Nos. 151-5; *Memorandum on the Position of Russia in Central Asia*. Pol. Progs. 1869, No. 65.

2 Pol. A. Progs., Feb., 1865, No. 153.

3 *Memorandum on the Position of Russia in Central Asia*. Op. cit.

expect any active intervention in his behalf on the part of this country, and H.M.G. would be greatly disinclined to make an appeal to Russia in the way of remonstrance on behalf of Persia.”¹ The Government of India had “no objection to relations of amity between Russia and Khokand,” and was not averse to, or apprehensive of, the Russian treaty with Bokhara.²

The progress of events in Central Asia, however, “caused an amount of uneasiness in England and India which was not to be disarmed by the assurance reiterated from St. Petersburg that the Tsar had no desire to add to his dominions. The news of the fall of Taskhand and Samarcand produced a sensation” both in India and England. Speculations of Russian invasion of India were rife. The Government of India also did not remain unaffected, though under the guidance of Sir John Lawrence alarmist tendencies were not permitted to grow. Two very comprehensive and illuminating appreciations were made of the situation and came in for review by the Government of India. One was by Lieutenant-Colonel Peter Lumsden, Deputy Quartermaster General of the Bengal Army,³ and the other by Sir Henry C. Rawlinson of the India Office.⁴ Besides these, a number of writers, both civil and military, also studied the situation but it is not necessary to examine them here as their conclusions supported either the one or the other of the contrary views held by the above-mentioned officers. Peter Lumsden discounted the gravity of the situation and minimised the possibility of Russian invasion, while Rawlinson held the thesis that if timely counter-action was not taken, Russian expansion in Central Asia would present a serious risk to the stability of British influence in Asia. Both of them scrutinised the strategic defences of India and assessed the importance of the practicable routes by which aggression could flow into the country. But their conclusions were different and the counsel which they gave to the Government was contradictory.

Lumsden prefaced his study⁵ by an analysis of the motives of Russian policy for which he considered it necessary, “first to investigate the probable objects of Russian advance ; second, to understand the strategical geography of the regions separating us and which must form the theatre of operations, and third,

1 Stanley to Alison, 30 March, 1868. For Deptt.S.H.Progs., 1868, No. 2.

2 F.D.S.H. Progs., No, 13, 1868.

3 Pol. A. Progs., Oct., 1867, No. 133.

4 Pol. A. Progs., Jan., 1869, No. 52, also printed as Ch. V of Rawlinson's *England and Russia in the East*.

5 *Memorandum of Central Asia*, dated 15 Sept., Pol.A.Progs., Oct., 1867, No. 135.

to lay down the positive object desired to be obtained.” He held the view that Russia’s object in Central Asia could not be different from that of England in India. Analysing the evidence as gleaned from various authorities on Central Asia and Russian statements, he wrote: “It may, I think, be allowed that the object of Russian advance is primarily to consolidate her empire by the annexation of rich countries, compensating for the immense tracts of desert steppes, as also by the protection or annexation of Khiva and Bokhara, with the possession of Kokan, Yarkund and Herat, to secure the great highway of inland Asiatic communication, and to unite her Asiatic and European possessions by the command of that route along which the Scythians of old and Huns of later periods carried the terror of their name to the remotest regions, or in other words, to make the watershed between the Indian Ocean and the Seas of Aral and Caspian the boundary between Russia and India, to develop its communications, and thereby secure the lines of commerce from Eastern to Western Asia and Europe. Such a frontier, contiguous to India, would also save her commerce from predatory attacks; and in case of European complication with England, on the eastern or any other question, afford her a convenient field from which to attack or threaten our Indian Empire, and thereby lock up a considerable amount of England’s available military resources.”

Lumsden laid due emphasis on the economic objective of Russian advance in Central Asia. Commerce had been the motive of the Russian empire equally with that of the British. It was therefore his view that ordinarily Russian expansion would not involve any serious menace to the British possessions in India. He came to the same conclusion by examining the topography of the regions intervening between the two empires. He held that “east of Bamean and the adjacent passes over the Hindoo Coosh, there is no route which an army from the north could traverse for the invasion of India.” There were only “two great highways” which were practicable. Herat was the converging point of these as it was well connected on one side with Astrabad on the Caspian and the Indian frontier on the other. As long, however, as the Uzbek tribes on the Oxus had not been wholly subjugated by Russia, a major invasion by that route was not feasible. But “the task to her would only be one of time, for diplomacy and power would doubtless gradually attach and settle the Uzbek States from Herat to Bulkh and Koondooz.” In that eventuality “Afghanistan would be the only state dividing Russia from India.” Herat was the key-point, but “equally distant from India and Russia” at the moment.

What should be the attitude of England towards Herat ? Should England make a push for it ?

Strategically as well as diplomatically the holding of Herat, he declared to be a folly. He argued that "Russia, in advancing at all events as far as Herat, increases her power, wealth and influence, securing a safer frontier, completes the possession of great lines of water communication by which to convey the agricultural and mineral products of her existing provinces, and of the countries at the head of the Syr and Oxus to the Aral and Caspian, and from thence to the centres of her Empire. Very different is the case with India ; every step beyond our present frontier only plunges her deeper into unremunerative regions and involves additional burdens on her already heavily taxed exchequer, it forces her into military strategical difficulties of the gravest nature, entailing at once a permanent increase of at least 20 or 30,000 men to the regular army." Holding the line of Herat would necessitate a friendly and docile Afghanistan which by the nature of its people was impossible, and consequently the Indian armies while engaged against Russia must always face the contingency of a hostile Afghanistan in their rear. The line of communication from Bolan to Herat will be "exposed throughout its entire left flank" to the infiltration of Russian forces, and threatened on its right by the Afghans themselves, because Kabul and Kandahar had not been occupied. Advancing "beyond the mountains forming our present strong frontier," and making "the difficult accessory zones in advance the principal field of operations" will necessarily complicate the strategic difficulties by doubling the extent of the theatre of operations. Hence, on strategic considerations, Lumsden was opposed to any extension towards Herat.

From the commercial point of view also, he considered the scheme to be chimerical. And if the object was "to compete with Russia in annexing Asiatic steppes . . . and a rival for the supremacy of a vast Anglo-Asiatic Empire, stretching from the confines of Japan to the banks of the Bosphorus," which the commercial elements would perhaps like to achieve, then the mission was beyond the means of England. Also, Afghanistan conquered and controlled by the British would be a severe financial and military liability. On these grounds Lumsden objected to the pursuit of any forward aggressive policy to meet Russia half-way on the Herat-Oxus line. The policy to be followed was thus enunciated by him : "To maintain the neutrality of Afghanistan, and to secure the natural strategic points of our line of defence, is the only safe policy now to be pursued."

The implementation of this policy demanded “the fulfilment in its full integrity of the treaty” between India and Afghanistan of 1855 by which the Government of India was bound to respect the territories of Afghanistan and never to interfere therein. It also called for a thorough understanding with Persia who must be warned that any extension eastwards would lead to the loss of her possessions at the mouth of the Euphrates and Tigris, and direct Indian assistance to Afghanistan towards the maintenance of her independence. Towards Russia it involved the pursuit of “a dignified path becoming to a civilized nation, and not allowing imaginary projects or panic to carry us into undertakings proved to be diametrically opposed to our own interests and only justified by the dog-in-the-manger policy of rushing at them, because Russia may avail herself of them.” Constructively, he emphasised that “Russia, like India, requires peace and development, and to secure from her a compact, guaranteeing the independence of Afghanistan and Herat, should be an initiatory measure to further combination for the development of communications, and a general understanding on an Asiatic policy which may be mutually advantageous.” He was no idealistic defeatist and did not advocate a mere defensive policy. He wanted positive relations to be established with Kabul to facilitate the influencing of the *de facto* government. He further desired the defences of India to be strengthened by railway developments and by real support of the Kabul Government to secure Kurram and Khost valleys where a force of 4 or 5,000 men might be located. The object of this measure was to “strengthen Afghan rule without involving ourselves in the direct occupation and administration of the country.” He most fervently pleaded for support to Afghanistan and “secure for her oppressed subjects the benefits of a stronger administration.” Strategically, an independent Afghanistan with her capital being “secured and connected with our internal lines of communication” must help to protect the right while any aggression on the left could easily be met by the deployment of strong forces from the Indus. In his view, the safety of the British empire in India could be ensured by a policy of non-aggression in Afghanistan and understanding with Russia.

A contrary diagnosis was made by Sir Henry Rawlinson in his “Memorandum on Central Asia” of 20th July, 1868.¹ Surveying the nature of Russian expansion in Central Asia, he was led inevitably to the conclusion “that nothing can prevent the

¹ Correspondence Afghanistan 1878, pp. 31-41; Rawlinson, *England and Russia in Central Asia*, Ch. V.

extinction of the three independent Governments of Khokand, Bokhara and Khiva, and the consequent extension of the Russian frontier to the Oxus," a prophecy which came true before long. There was no doubt that Russia had acquired dominance over Khokand and Bokhara by 1868 and her attention was directed to the acquisition of supremacy over Khiva also. How this position would affect the British interests in India was the next question which he examined. That the new territories would be developed and strengthened as military and commercial bases was inevitable, which would facilitate movement of Russian troops into the heart of Asia. Roads and railways would connect Turkestan with the Caspian and beyond with Russia. If Russia were to be content with "consolidation and improvement of her newly acquired territory northward of the Oxus, no serious injury would come to the British interests beyond the gradual exclusion of commerce from the markets of Central Asia." But he did not believe that Russia would be able to "maintain this passive and innocuous attitude." She must be inevitably led to "exercise an influence on Afghanistan." Hence he concluded that "we are exposed to a certain danger from the advance of Russia to the Oxus, and that danger approaches us through Afghanistan, but the danger is not immediate and it is evitable."

Further analysing the prospects of Russian interference in Afghanistan, he held the view that "the implication of Russia in Afghan affairs is no longer a matter of speculation." He, however, discounted the possibility of a Russian invasion of India through Kabul, which he thought could come only by way of Herat and Kandahar. "But," he stated, "it is not invasion from any quarter, or in any form, that we have at present to guard against. The presence of Russia will make itself felt in a less obtrusive, though perhaps in a not less effective way . . . The intrusion of a foreign European element within the restricted circle of our Indian relations will of itself exert a disturbing influence through the country of a most mischievous and even dangerous tendency. . . . There can, indeed, be no doubt that if Russia once assumes a position which, in virtue either of imposing military forces on the Oxus, or of a dominant political influence in Afghanistan, entitles her in native estimation to challenge our Asiatic supremacy, the disquieting effect will be prodigious." It was the effect of Russian advance on the temper of the Indian people which Rawlinson most dreaded. Russia's control over Kabul might have set ablaze the whole of the frontier and placed the British "in a position of very considerable difficulty, of such difficulty indeed, as to

require extensive reinforcements from England." That it was no idle speculation, Rawlinson tried to show by reference to the mood of the Afghans towards the British, and Russia's watching the events in Kabul from her position of vantage in Bokhara and "nursing her little nucleus of Afghan refugees."

From the analysis of this situation, Rawlinson was led to the conclusion that "it would seem to be our bounden duty at once to step forward and forestall" Russia in Kabul. He fully endorsed Auckland's policy of "establishing a strong and friendly power on our North-West Frontier." To achieve this purpose, he pleaded for effective support to Sher Ali whose "fortunes are again in the ascendant." He wanted Sher Ali to "be secured in our interests without further delay" and if necessary "to furnish him with arms and officers or even to place an auxiliary contingent at his disposal; but whatever the price, it must be paid, of such paramount importance is it to obtain at the present time a dominant position at Kabul, and to close that avenue of approach against Russia." Rawlinson was emphatic that a dominant position in Kabul "we must inevitably occupy sooner or later, unless we are prepared to jeopardise our Indian Empire." He wrote, "In the interests, then, of peace, in the interests of commerce, in the interests of moral and material improvement, it may be asserted that interference in Afghanistan has now become a duty, and that any moderate outlay or responsibility we may incur in restoring order at Kabul will prove, in the sequel, to be true economy."

He further supported his thesis by dilating upon the strategic significance of Russian advance in Central Asia. Herat is the "key to India", and "if Russia were once established in full strength at Herat, and her communications were secured in one direction with Astrabad through Meshed, in another with Khiva through Merv, and in a third with Tashkand and Bokhara through Mymneh and the passage of the Oxus, all the forces of Asia would be inadequate to expel her from the position . . . and she would have the means of seriously injuring us, since the unchallenged occupation of Herat would place the whole military resources of Persia and Afghanistan at her disposal." To prevent this danger it would be best to anticipate Russia which depended for its success on altering the course of British diplomacy towards Persia, Afghanistan and the states of Central Asia. He recommended some remedial measures which were, firstly, that "Sher Ali Khan should be subsidized and strengthened at Kabul;" secondly, "to recover our lost ground in Persia, so as to prevent the possibility of Russia making use of that country as an instrument to facilitate her

own advance towards India;" thirdly, "to improve communications with the Afghan frontier," and lastly, to establish "a fortified outwork at Quetta." In brief, he wanted the then policy of "masterly inactivity" to be substituted by one more active, interfering and expansive so as to bring Afghanistan and Persia more unequivocally within the orbit of British influence.

Thus in 1868 when Russia had acquired Tashkand and was in full control of Bokhara and Khokand and was well poised for an advance against Khiva, two opposite views had been expressed in relation to the British policy pursued towards Afghanistan, which called for a clear examination of the situation and the formulation of a policy integrated to the needs of the moment. There was no doubt that Lawrence's policy of waiting on the events in Afghanistan was no longer applicable as its premises had been exploded. The civil war in Afghanistan could not long remain a mere incident in isolation, for the parties must look for assistance outside. In that eventuality what should be the attitude of the Government of India, whether and whom they should assist and what should be the motive for such assistance; these were natural questions. Lawrence's government gave full consideration to the conflicting views and, while affirming the essentials of their policy, betokened necessary change.

From the minutes written at the time by the members of the Government of India, it is clear that they did not view the Russian advance in Central Asia with the alarm which characterised the writings of Rawlinson, Green, Bellew and a host of other writers. The possibility of a Russian invasion of India was emphatically denied and it was asserted that any such move would encounter the determined opposition of the intervening people and tribes and the stout resistance of the Indian army on the natural frontier of India. In the contentment of the Indian people and preparedness on this side of the frontier was placed more confidence for the security of British rule in India than in any chimerical schemes of advance to Herat and meeting the enemy half-way. It was rightly believed that the Afghans would view with distrust, jealousy and hostility any British military movement within their territories. The lessons of 1840 had left a deep impression, and no one could be bold enough to hope that circumstances had changed to justify an active interference in that country. Lawrence wrote: "The Afghans do not want us, they dread our appearance in their country. The circumstances connected with the last Afghan war have created in their hearts a deadly hatred to us as a people."¹ The Afghans were hostile even to the idea of British

¹ Minute. 3 Oct., 1867, para 5.

officers visiting their country or being stationed as political agents. Lawrence was therefore opposed to any such proposal which he attributed to the desire for "distinction and preferment" of the officers and eagerness of the merchants "to find new marts for their goods." But the Government of India was not prepared to adopt a course which might involve loss "in prestige, in honour, in the valuable lives of our officers and soldiers, by interfering actively in the affairs of Central Asia."

Lawrence and his colleagues had no faith in any forward movement and were opposed even to Lumsden's moderate suggestion for "the formation of a cantonment at Quetta, a lease of the vallies of Khost and Korrum." Any idea of occupation of Herat and Kandahar was rejected on the ground of insecurity and its consequences on the finances and the fidelity of the martial classes of India. Moreover, it was believed that such a procedure was militarily unsound as it would give to Russia an advantageous ground by lessening her distance while increasing "the interval between our own troops and their true base of operations." The difficulties of maintenance and communication, which have been tremendous even in the twentieth century, must have deterred even the boldest heart from adopting that course in the nineteenth century. Lawrence firstly discounted the hostile intentions of Russia, but even if it were so, after an exhausting march up to the borders of India, they could be opposed by "our troops who would have the option of meeting them either in the defiles of the mountains, or as they debouched from the passes ; at the passage of the Indus ; wherever, in short, the genius of the commander might dictate." Hence, after taking all these aspects into full consideration, Lawrence came firstly to the conclusion that "our proper course is not to advance our troops beyond our present borders ; not to send British officers into the different states of Central Asia ; but to put our own house in order by giving the people of India the best Government in our power, by conciliating, as far as practicable, all classes and by consolidating our resources." He was, however, in agreement with Lumsden's proposal to open up lines of communication up to the strategic line of defence on the frontier."¹

This view was fully supported by his colleagues, who, by their knowledge and experience of Indian affairs, were best entitled to express an opinion on this problem. Norman Durand and Mansfeld were military officers of note, who, in their minutes in 1867, exploded the panicky conceptions of a Russian invasion. Durand counselled preparedness to "ensure

¹ Minute, 3 Oct., 1867.

rapid and effective action either on or beyond the Indus." The policy which he advocated was "to avoid all aggressive occupation of posts in advance of our present frontiers, and to cultivate as good an understanding with Afghan and Balooch Rulers as possible." Mansfeld, the Commander-in-Chief, on his part, did not see any reason for interference in the civil war in Afghanistan, and decried aggression on moral grounds of British policy. Interference could be justified only "in defence of interests clearly affecting ourselves." But Afghanistan presented no danger to the British power, and there were no "circumstances impelling us to move forward." He deprecated a course of action "which would unite the whole population of Afghanistan in the most active hostility towards us, and which would compel us further to meet that hostility on the ground most favourable to those we should contend against, with a great waste of our resources." Then analysing the military considerations accruing from Russian opposition, he came to the conclusion that "we cannot afford to depart from a military policy which keeps our means of defence generally stationed for the purpose of India herself." The British as foreigners could not hope to rouse the national spirit of the people in a conflict with Russia. Hence he stated that if the conflict were to come in future, it "can alone be prosecuted to a successful conclusion by us on our side of the mountain barriers of India."¹

These arguments were further reinforced by Lawrence in his minute of 25th November, 1868 in reply to the memorandum of Sir Henry Rawlinson.² He reiterated his conviction that the policy adopted by him towards the Afghan civil war was the right policy in the circumstances. But a change in his attitude is discernible in so far as he was prepared to offer Amir Sher Ali "some material assistance in the shape of money, arms, ammunition and accoutrements, to enable him to strengthen his hold on his country." This course he justified on the ground that Sher Ali had "recovered his throne and had apparently got the better of all his enemies . . . the time seemed at length to have arrived, when we might, with some show of reason, help him to render firm his recovered position and to consolidate his power."³ For this purpose he intended

1 Pol.A.Progs., Oct., 1867, Nos. 134-140 for Minutes of Viceroy and the members of the Government of India.

2 Pol.A.Progs., Jan., 1869, No. 67.

3 Dharm Pal agrees that there was slight modification in Lawrence's policy, but "the plan of subsidising the Amir, without any entanglements in the affairs of Afghanistan, far from implying a break-down in the policy of inaction, formed an integral part of the policy of 'masterly inactivity.'" Dharm Pal, p. 194

to invite the Amir to India and “ascertain whether the Ameer of Kabul . . . might not feel earnestly desirous of entering into friendly relations and of receiving from us some moderate aid” to maintain his position. This remarkable change in his policy was actuated by the realisation of the danger to the “interests of England in India” arising from the advance of Russia in Central Asia. He admitted now that the approach of Russia towards the North-Western Frontier of India would “involve us in great difficulties and this being the case, it will be a wise and prudent policy to endeavour to maintain a thoroughly friendly power between India and the Russian possessions in Central Asia.”

He did not, however, agree with the prescription of Rawlinson and most definitely denied the necessity of an advance into Afghanistan or an attempt to dominate that country. He did not endorse the necessity of occupying Quetta or of establishing a British Agent in Kabul or the organisation of a force for service in that country. He was in favour of curtailing rather than extending the frontiers on the Afghan side. But he had no objection to the proposal to subsidize Sher Ali without seeking any return for it. He was not prepared to accept the probable request of the Amir “for an offensive and defensive alliance between him and the British Government.” He wrote : “I would not consent to any engagement which might imply responsibility on our part for the maintenance of his authority. I would not even guarantee the payment of an annual subsidy for a term of years. I would rather suggest that we simply engage to give the Ameer a certain sum annually so long as we are satisfied with his bearing and conduct towards us.” General fidelity towards the British was the only condition to be attached to such assistance, though the Amir was expected to keep the tribes on his side under full control. Lawrence’s policy at the moment was summed up in the following words : “While strictly refusing to enter into anything like an offensive and defensive alliance with the Ameer of Kabul, I think it should be carefully explained to him that we are interested in the security of his dominions from foreign invasion; and that provided he remains strictly faithful to his engagements, we are prepared to support his independence. But that the manner of doing so must rest with ourselves.”

These views were communicated by the Government of India to the Secretary of State for India on 4th January, 1869,¹ and

¹ Govt. of India to Secretary of State, No. 1, 4 Jan., 1869. Pol. A. Progs., No. 66, Jan., 1869.

formed the basis of the policy pursued by Lawrence's successor. It may, therefore, be necessary here, even at the risk of some repetition, to state that policy. The Government of India, at the outset did not see any reason "to recommend any substantial alteration in the course of policy to be adopted on the frontier or beyond it" for "any serious departure from those principles would be the cause of grave political and financial embarrassments." They summed up their policy as follows: "We object to any active interference in the affairs of Afghanistan by the deputation of a high British officer with or without a contingent, or by the forcible or amicable occupation of any post or tract in that country beyond our frontier, inasmuch as we think such a measure would engender irritation, defiance and hatred in the minds of the Afghans without in the least strengthening our power either for attack or defence. We think it impolitic and unwise to decrease any of the difficulties which would be entailed on Russia, if that power seriously thought of invading India, as we should certainly decrease them if we left our own frontier and met her half-way in a difficult country and in the midst of a hostile or exasperated population. . . . Our true policy, our strongest security, would then, we conceive, be found to lie in previous abstinence from entanglements at either Kabul, Kandahar, or any similar outpost, in full reliance on a compact, highly equipped, and disciplined army stationed within our own territories or on our own border." To maintain this policy, the Government of India suggested the adoption of certain measures. These were firstly "to come to some clear understanding with the Court of St. Petersburg as to its projects and designs in Central Asia, and that it might be given to understand that it cannot be permitted to interfere in the affairs of Afghanistan or in those of any state which lies contiguous to our frontier;" secondly, that relations with Teheran be dealt with by the Government of India instead of by the Government of England; thirdly, that the *de facto* ruler of Kabul may be rendered substantial assistance in arms, ammunition and money, "as well as moral support, as occasion may offer, but without any formal offensive or defensive alliance;" and lastly, that Amir Sher Ali might meet the Governor-General and thus acquaint his views, hopes and desires to the Government of India.

These views of the Government of India were accepted by Her Majesty's Government¹ and were enforced by Lord Mayo on his assuming the Viceroyalty in 1869. Sher Ali's position

¹ Despatches of the Secretary of State, dated 12 March, 16 and 30 April, 1869.

also improved and with the aid rendered to him he was able soon to become the undisputed master of Kabul. He was also enabled to accept the invitation of the Governor-General to visit India and meet the head of the Government. It was at the close of March 1869 that this meeting took place in Ambala where Sher Ali was impressed with the might of the British empire. The Amir had desired to ensure his position on the throne and the integrity of his kingdom. For that purpose he was eager for a binding alliance between the two states which would afford him protection against foreign aggression and security against internal opposition. It is clear from the reports of the Ambala Conference that Sher Ali, sobered by his misfortunes and fully impressed by the growing tide of Russian expansion in Central Asia, had sought for definite stipulations which would afford him Indian aid in an emergency. That he had genuine dread of Russian designs and was sincerely drawn towards India cannot be doubted. But Sher Ali was not prepared, in the interests of amity, to allow British officers or contingents to be stationed in his country, both because of the anti-British temper of his people and the fear of British interference in his affairs. Lord Mayo, on his part, was bound by the policy so clearly laid down for him by Lawrence and Her Majesty's Government, and while believing in professions of goodwill, amity and moral support, was not competent to enter into any definite treaty relations or to offer any promise of regular, permanent subsidy. Thus, while on the one hand, Sher Ali sought a treaty, fixed subsidy, assistance in men or arms to be given not when the Government of India might think fit to grant but when he might think it needful to solicit it, and a well-defined engagement laying the Government of India under an obligation to support the Afghan Government in an emergency, Lord Mayo, on the other, was not prepared for any definite undertakings. All that he was able to assure the Amir was that his government had no intention of interfering in internal affairs and that “it will view with severe displeasure any attempt on the part of your rivals to disturb your position as ruler of Kabul and rekindle civil war . . . it will endeavour to strengthen the Government of Your Highness to enable you to exercise with equity and with justice your rightful rule and to transmit to your descendants all the dignity and honour of which you are the lawful possessor.”¹

¹ Letter to the Amir, 31 March 1869. For an account of the Ambala Conference see Despatch to the Secretary of State, dated 3rd April 1869, and its Enclosures, and Despatch dated 1st July, 1869. Correspondence Afghanistan 1878, pp. 88-91 and pp. 92-100, Argyll. *The Eastern Question* II, Ch. XIV.

It is clear from Mayo's despatch of 1st July, 1869 that the Amir was given no promise of either treaty, fixed subsidy or dynastic pledges. He was merely offered "warm countenance and support, discouragement of his rivals, such material assistance as we may deem absolutely necessary for his immediate wants, constant and friendly communication through the Commissioner of Peshawar and a native agent at Kabul ; he on his part, undertaking to do all he can to maintain peace on our frontier and comply with all wishes in matters of trade."¹ But this vague and non-committal policy did not find favour with the Secretary of State who, while prepared to see a strong and settled government in Afghanistan which might promote commerce, was not willing to limit "the discretion of the Indian Government as to the occasions on which and as to all the circumstances under which assistance should be given or withheld." Her Majesty's Government wanted to retain their freedom to deal with any situation. They desired the Amir to promote British commerce and wished him to abide by the friendship with India, but were not willing to pay the price for it. They wanted his friendship against future danger from Russia but were not ready to enter into any pact with him for the purpose.² Russian danger was not acute at the moment and in pursuance of Lawrence's recommendation to negotiate terms with Russia, no need was then felt of binding Sher Ali closely in an alliance with the Government of India. The Amir also now appeared to be content with these indefinite assurances for he coveted, at the moment, the prestige of friendly relations with India to attain strength against any rivals at home, and because the danger of Russian aggression was not immediate. Thus Lawrence's policy, derisively called "Masterly Inactivity," proved successful in maintaining peace, limiting commitments and securing the friendship and goodwill of the Amir of Kabul.

1 Correspondence Afghanistan, 1878, pp. 92-100.

2 Despatch from Secretary of State, Secret No. 6, 14 May, 1869 Correspondence Afghanistan 1878, pp. 91-2.

CHAPTER IV

BUFFER STATES

AN essential concept of Lawrence's policy was to arrive at "an understanding and even an engagement with Russia" in respect of the "spheres of influence of the two great Empires in Central Asia." He had asked the Secretary of State "to endeavour to come to some mutual arrangement and to an understanding with Russia, and failing that, we might give that power to understand that an advance towards India beyond a certain point would entail war in all parts of the world with England."¹ The Government in England was also prepared for such a course. The alarm raised by the earlier expansion of Russian territories in Central Asia had been laid to rest by Prince Gortchakoff's Circular of 1864 in which he had laid stress "on the interest which Russia evidently has not to increase her territory, and above all, to avoid raising complications on her frontiers, which can but delay and paralyse her domestic development."² The occasion, however, which the issue of this document had offered was not made use of by the British Government in proposing the delimitation of their spheres of influence by asking for a joint guarantee of the independence of Bokhara. Russia, too, did not keep to her pledge and forced the pace against Bokhara. Subsequent conquests of Tashkand and Samarkand, and the new British policy towards Afghanistan awakened the British Foreign Office to the need of asking for such a delimitation in 1869. The British Press discussed the situation and realised the impracticability of forcing Russia to give up her position in Central Asia but that it was possible "to keep an ever watchful eye on her doings, and to take without a moment's delay all such precautionary measures as may be possible." One of the means of arresting Russian progress towards India was "to make Afghanistan and Kashgar neutral territories." Correspondence ensued between the Court of St. James and the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Lord Clarendon, in March 1869, had suggested the "recognition of some territory as neutral between the possessions of England and Russia which should be the limit of those possessions and be scrupulously respected by both powers." Baron Brunnow

1 Minute dated 25 Nov., 1868 para 9, Correspondence Afghanistan 1878, p. 1

2 Krausse, *Russia in Asia*, p. 205

brought the positive assurance of Russia to treat Afghanistan as entirely beyond the sphere of Russian influence. Clarendon expressed his doubts whether Afghanistan could fulfil the conditions of a neutral territory.¹ Terentyef reports that at the personal conference between Clarendon and Gortchakoff, the former had said, "We have strongly advised Sher Ali Khan to refrain from all such action as could possibly give Russia any reason for suspicion and we have told him that if he insists on adopting a contrary line of action he will under no circumstances meet with any sympathy or support whatever from England. This has already been said to him and will be repeated so as to avoid the possibility of any future misunderstanding."² It appears from that report that Clarendon had been fully satisfied with the Russian professions of their desire to develop commerce and to seek no more territories.

Lord Clarendon's proposal for the recognition of a neutral territory between the Russian and British possessions in Central Asia, and entering into a treaty of guarantee with Russia found little support in India,³ not because Mayo's Government was opposed to an understanding with Russia but because of realising the implications of neutrality which were considered to be incompatible with the relations established with Afghanistan and also with the future interests of the British empire in that region. Lord Mayo desired to maintain permanent friendly relations with Russia and fully sympathised with the object "of establishing a frank and clear understanding with the Government of the Emperor of Russia, as to the relative position of British and Russian interests in Asia."⁴ Yet he did not believe that the form of this understanding as outlined by Clarendon would be in the interest of India. He therefore adumbrated his policy towards the neighbouring states as being "to endeavour to show to the Rulers of these states and to the world, that in respect to them our policy of annexation has passed away ; that it is the desire of the British Government to assist them in becoming strong and independent ; that their safety against foreign aggression lies mainly in an alliance with Great Britain;

1 Clarendon to Buchanan, 27 March 1869, Correspondence Central Asia No. 2 (1873), pp. 1-2; Argyll, II p. 283.

2 Terentyef, II p. 126; Report of the conversation is given in Clarendon to Buchanan, dated 3 Sept., 1869, *Central Asia* (2) 1873 pp. 9-10. Russia's suggestion to recognise Afghanistan as the neutral zone was not strongly disputed by Clarendon, though it appears he did not wholly admit it.

3 Despatch to Secretary of State, No. 177, 3 June 1869 gives a clear expression of these views. In this and succeeding paragraphs extracts have been made from this despatch.

4 Ibid., para 3.

and that by just and good administration it is within their power to command the willing allegiance of their own subjects and the respect of neighbouring states.”¹ This policy was sought to be applied towards the three frontier states of Kalat, Afghanistan and Kashgar. Its implementation in respect of Kalat involved ensuring its security against the aggressions of Persia. Mayo desired, therefore, that “steps should at a fitting opportunity be taken for procuring an accurate definition of the frontier between the possessions of the Shah of Persia and those of the Khan of Khelat.”² The Amir of Afghanistan was also to be assured against any apprehensions from the west. At the same time the Amir was given reasonable guarantees to hope that in case of attack “from the Bokhara or Turkistan side” he could expect the Government of India to endeavour “to strengthen him and to enable him successfully to defend his rightful possessions.”³ Mayo’s Government was also hopeful of being able soon “to extend over its inhabitants (of Yarkand) a friendly and peaceful influence.”⁴ Thus the policy of the Government of India in respect of the “line of frontier states extending from Kurrachea to Thibet” was to make their rulers “feel that our wish is that they should be secured in their independence; and that we desire to maintain among them national, and consequently according to their views, popular government.”⁵

This policy amounted to the establishment of a sphere of British influence in these states. “A declaration of absolute neutrality, enforced by treaty with a European state in regard to those countries” was, therefore, inconsistent with the intentions and aspirations of British policy which would not shirk from using force to bend the unwilling and headstrong tribes to its will. As Mayo’s Government wrote, they might be obliged on occasions “to take the law into our own hands,” and then a treaty of neutrality, as in the case of Belgium, would “be found exceedingly inconvenient.” Hence they wrote “It is in our opinion essential to our strength and power in this country that we should be responsible to no Foreign Potentate for any of our dealings with the people who inhabit our frontiers. They now respect our justice and dread our power, but if they were once to feel that by appealing to any extraneous influence whatsoever they could impede our action to render our course regarding them less free, our present position would be

1 Despatch 3 June 1869, para 8.

2 Ibid., para 10.

3 Ibid., para 14.

4 Ibid., para 19.

5 Ibid., para 20.

entirely changed, and our relation with them would be a source of immediate and ever recurring danger.”¹ Imperialism in contact with backward tribal communities brooked no interference in its process of expansion either from a foreign state or from any binding stipulations. Mayo considered that a treaty with Russia for the neutralisation of the border states was a “fertile source of dispute” between the two empires. Moreover, the Government of India in the then situation was unable to “make a solemn declaration that under no circumstances should a British soldier cross our western or north western boundaries ; that temporary occupancy of particular spots for military or political purposes should not be resorted to, or that the chastisement, or even conquest, of an aggressive tribe should be placed beyond our power.”² Nor could Russia be expected to adhere to any such restraints on her expansion. Therefore Mayo's Government was opposed to any definite treaty with Russia for the neutralisation of Afghanistan or any other frontier state. All that they desired was “that a wide border of independent states should exist between the British frontier and the Russian boundary” and for that purpose “Russia should be invited to adopt the policy with regard to Khiva and other kindred states, that we are willing to pledge ourselves to adopt towards Khelat, Afghanistan and the districts around Yarkand.” All that was necessary was to have “a pledge of mutual non-interference, unratified by Treaty.”³

Whether it was on account of the suspicion of Russia's *bona fides* in respecting her pledges, or it was because of the genuine doubt of the effectiveness of a neutrality agreement to maintain peace, or it was under the impulse of maintaining the liberty of action of the British empire towards its neighbouring weak states, the Government of India did not acquiesce in Lord Clarendon's proposal for the “recognition of some territory as neutral between the possessions of England and Russia, which should be the limit of those possessions and which should be scrupulously respected by both Powers.”⁴ Russia also does not appear to have accepted this suggestion in all its implications. It is clear from Baron Brunnow's statement that the Russian Chancellor, while keen to limit its application to Afghanistan, did not desire to extend it to the territories then subject to Russian influence or to the areas likely to be brought within

1 Despatch 3 June 1869, paras 32-33.

2 Ibid., para 38.

3 Ibid., paras 39-40.

4 Despatch to Secretary of State, 30 June 1873, para 3, F.D.S.P. June 1873, No. 366.

such a zone. Brunnow merely conveyed "the positive assurance that His Imperial Majesty looks upon Afghanistan as completely outside the sphere within which Russia may be called upon to exercise her influence. No intervention whatever, opposed to the independence of that state, enters into his intentions."¹ There was no mention of Bokhara, Khokand or Khiva in this statement for the neutral zone was never intended by Russia to extend to those states.

Meanwhile, the Government of India's clear analysis of the policy towards Afghanistan and other frontier states had led Clarendon to shift his position, and he informed the Russian Government that "Afghanistan would not fulfil those conditions of a neutral territory that it was the object of the two Governments to establish . . . and that it was, therefore, thought advisable to propose that the Upper Oxus should be the boundary line which neither Power should permit its forces to cross."² The matter, however, was discussed in 1869 at the meeting of Lord Clarendon and Prince Gortchakoff at Heidelberg and again when Douglas Forsyth visited St. Petersburg in the latter part of the year. It was ultimately agreed "that beyond the limit of the provinces which the Ameer of Afghanistan then held he should not attempt to exercise any interference or influence,—that the good offices of England should be exerted to restrain him from all thought of aggression and that, similarly, Russia should exercise all her influence to restrain Bokhara from transgressing the limits of Afghan territory." Gortchakoff expressed some doubt of the extent of Russian influence over Bokhara, though "he did not anticipate much difficulty in inducing the Ruler of Bokhara to abstain from aggressive acts against Afghanistan." He was sure that Khokand would follow Russian advice. As regards Yarkand he assured that "Russia had no hostile intention towards him (Atalik Ghazi) or any desire to make any conquest in its territories."³ Thus Russia recognised Afghanistan as lying outside her sphere of influence towards which she had no aggressive intentions. Yarkand was also declared to be a similar zone. Indirectly it was also admitted that Afghanistan lay within the sphere of British influence whereas Bokhara and

¹ Gortchakoff to Brunnow, Feb., 24 (March 7) 1869, *Central Asia* No. 2 (1873) p. 3

² Clarendon to Rumbold, 17 April 1869. *Central Asia* (2) 1873. p. 4

³ Despatch from the Secretary of State, 30 June 1873, F.D.S.P. 1873, June, No. 336; F.D.S.P. April 1872, No. 1-38; Jan., 1873, Nos. 153-157, March 1873, Nos. 25-97, *Central Asia* (2) 1873 and *Correspondence with Russia respecting Central Asia* 1873 (C.699); Argyll. II. Ch. IX. Details of negotiations are given in these papers.

Khokand comprised the Russian zone of influence. No mention was made of Khiva. The Upper Oxus was recognised as roughly the line dividing these two spheres of influence, but the delimitation of the frontiers of Afghanistan was essential before this line could be confirmed as separating the two zones. The negotiations of 1869 had commenced with the proposal to create buffer states but ended in recognising the spheres of influence.

The 1869 exchange of views had led to the agreement on the basis that Afghanistan was outside the sphere of Russian interest and that the territory in the actual possession of Sher Ali at the moment constituted the limits of Afghanistan. It was also accepted that the British Government was responsible for restraining the Amir from any attempts at aggression beyond his frontiers as the Russian empire would prevent the Amir of Bokhara from attacking Afghan territory. The fact that the Government of India possessed influence over Sher Ali and Atalik Ghazi, the ruler of Yarkand, was fully recognised as was the substance of Russian control over Bokhara and Khokand. This is what the Government of India had asked for at the close of 1869 when they desired the Czar's government to adopt "the same course with regard to those countries which bound the Russian possessions in Central Asia as we have taken towards Afghanistan." This policy was believed to result in creating "on the frontiers a series of influenced, but not tributary or neutralised states, to secure to them national independence and put an end for ever to that state of conflict and internal disturbance which has for ages prevailed in those regions."¹ This was an instrument of peace. The Government of India, at the same time, made no secret of the state of their relations with Afghanistan and wished the Russians to know that the integrity of Afghanistan was of prime concern to them and that in conformity with the understanding reached at Ambala, they would be bound to assist Sher Ali in certain contingencies.²

When in 1869 Forsyth had taken up the subject of a neutral zone with the Russian Government in St. Petersburg, he had insisted that it should comprise all the territories which had been held by Dost Muhammad. The Russian Government had merely agreed to instruct their Governor-General Kaufmann to cause a careful report to be drawn up about the extent of such possessions. Later when the proposal for a neutral zone was dropped and the Upper Oxus was suggested as the line dividing the two spheres of influence, it had been repeatedly insisted by the Indian and British governments that the

1 Despatch to Secretary of State, No. 366, 30 June 1873, para 11.

2 Despatch to Secretary of State, 30 June 1873. paras 10, 16, 17, 18.

boundaries of Afghanistan should be defined and mutually agreed to between Russia and England. It appears that the long expected report of Kaufmann did not materialise.

Ultimately the British Government decided, contrary to Forsyth's proposal, for a negotiated frontier upon a unilateral declaration of the limits of Sher Ali's dominions and presenting to the Czar's government almost an accomplished fact. The British Ambassador at the court of St. Petersburg, thereupon, communicated to the Russian Government the decision of the British Foreign Office in the following words:—

"In the opinion of Her Majesty's Government, the right of the Ameer of Kabul (Sher Ali) to the possession of the territories up to the Oxus as far down as Khojah Salah is fully established, and they believe and have so stated to him . . . that he would have a right to defend those territories if invaded.

"On the other hand, Her Majesty's authorities in India have declared their determination to remonstrate strongly with the Ameer should he evince any disposition to overstep these limits of his kingdom.

"Hitherto the Ameer has proved most amenable to the advice offered to him by the Indian Government and has cordially accepted the peaceful policy which they have recommended him to adopt, because the Indian Government have been able to accompany their advice with an assurance that the territorial integrity of Afghanistan would in like manner be respected by those powers beyond his frontiers which are amenable to the influence of Russia . . .

"Her Majesty's Government believe that it is now in the power of the Russian Government by an explicit recognition of the right of the Ameer of Kabul to those territories which he now claims, which Bokhara herself admits to be his, and which all evidence as yet produced shows to be in his actual and effectual possession to assist the British Government in perpetuating the peace and prosperity of those regions, and in removing for ever by such means all cause of uneasiness and jealousy between England and Russia in regard to their respective policies in Asia.

". . . . I state the territories and boundaries which Her Majesty's Government consider might fully belong to the Ameer of Kabul, viz.

- "(1) Badakshan with its independent districts of Wakhan from the Sarikal on the east to the junction of the Kokcha River with the Oxus (or Punjab) forming the northern boundary of this Afghan province throughout its entire extent.

- “(2) Afghan Turkestan comprising the districts of Kunduz, Khuldja and Balkh, the northern boundary of which would be the line of the Oxus from the junction of the Kokcha River to the post of Khojah Salah inclusive on the highroad from Bokhara to Balkh. Nothing to be claimed by the Afghan Ameer on the left bank of the Oxus below Khojah Salah.
- “(3) The internal districts of Akcha, Siripool, Maimna Shibbergan and Andkoi, the latter of which would be the extreme Afghan frontier possession to the north-west, the desert beyond belonging to independent tribes of Turcoman.”¹

The manœuvre had its result. The Russian Government was faced with a decision, an accomplished fact, which they ultimately accepted in full though for some time they demurred to the inclusion of Balkh, Badakshan and Wakhan in the Afghan territories, as they regarded these principalities as independent territories. It seems that the Russian conception of a neutral zone comprehended these territories which should intervene between Bokhara and Afghanistan as a neutral region. Such a neutral zone would have provided a bridgehead for Russia to establish her influence to the south of the Oxus and thereby not only pave the way for the eventual subordination of Afghanistan but also for establishing herself on the most important strategic points on the road to India. The British Government was not prepared to acquiesce in it and therefore insisted on the recognition of Badakshan and Wakhan as parts of Afghanistan, which was ultimately forthcoming.

It may be appropriate here to examine the effect of this agreement on Russian interests and Indo-Afghan relations. Diplomatically the agreement was a triumph for the British policy as it was presumed to be an instrument for the securing of peaceful conditions in Central Asia and the rehabilitation of Indo-British influence in the frontier states. But the mode of its execution must have given umbrage to the Russian Government. Mitchell in one of his notes wrote that this decided policy of Great Britain was distasteful to Russia, because, firstly, owing to the idea of a neutral zone having been abandoned, it had been possible for the Anglo-Indian governments to manifest “an interest in Afghanistan of a very marked and significant character” which by consolidating Afghan monarchy on the southern boundaries of Russia would substantially affect the Russian military or political position in Central Asia. By this

¹ F.D.S.P. 1873, Jan., Nos. 153, 154, 157.

means a door was opened for the intrigues of the Central Asian chiefs with the Amir of Afghanistan for the ultimate expulsion of their Russian conquerors. Secondly, because of its being "regarded throughout Central Asia as an act of menace towards Russia," "the extension and establishment of the influence of Russian Central Asia" would become less easy. Mitchell was led by his precipitate optimism even to conclude that Russia by virtue of "her footing in Central Asia" being "less secure" would have to seek British goodwill even "to render a position in Bokhara, Khiva and Khokand tenable and profitable." He concluded: "The Russian occupation of the whole of the plains of Central Asia down to the Oxus may be looked upon by England with calm indifference so soon as the outposts of British influence shall have been firmly fixed along a well defined and easily defended line, and so soon, also, as Maimena, Merv and Herat shall have been secured against occupation by enemies to British rule or interference."¹ Whether there was justification for this optimism may be judged from the sequence of events. One fact is certain that this brusque declaration of Afghanistan's northern boundary led to the expeditious liquidation of Khiva and the desire of Russia to eliminate the gap between her possessions and the recognised frontiers of Afghanistan. Russia had also affirmed her intention to treat Afghanistan as outside her sphere of interest. This attitude was reiterated by her agents in Central Asia and used to secure a basis for friendly relations with the ruler of Kabul.

The boundary agreement was the logical conclusion of the relations established by Mayo with Sher Ali. The Indian policy, without being expressed to the Amir in so many words and without any treaty engagement for his support by British troops being concluded, was most clearly expounded by the Government of India, viz., "the complete independence of Afghanistan is so important to the interests of British India that the Government of India could not look upon an attack upon Afghanistan with indifference. So long as the Ameer continues to act in accordance with our advice in his relations with his neighbours, he would naturally look for material assistance from us, and circumstances might occur under which we should consider it incumbent upon us to recommend Her Majesty's Government to render him such assistance."² The substance of this policy was made known to the Russian Government which

¹ *Memorandum on Central Asia—Boundaries of Bokhara and Afghanistan*, by Robert Mitchell, 16 Dec., 1872, F.D.S.P. 1873 March No. 33; *Memorandum on the State of Correspondence with Russia on the Subject of Central Asia*, by Mitchell, F. D. S. P. 1873 May No. 132;

² Despatch to Secretary of State, 30 June 1873, para 18.

admitted the pre-eminent position of the Indo-British government in Kabul. At the same time, the two governments had also accepted the responsibility to restrain their protege states from "aggression upon each other." The Government of India had, as a consequence of the Afghan boundary settlement, taken upon themselves the right and the obligation "to use all the influence they possess with the Ameer to prevent him from transgressing that boundary," while Russia had bound herself "to restrain Bokhara and other states from aggression on Afghanistan."¹ The peace and tranquillity of Afghanistan thus depended on the Amir confining himself to his then defined boundaries, for then "he need fear no molestation from Russia or the countries under her influence."² If the Government of India were responsible for the security of Afghanistan, and if they had stipulated for her integrity with Russia, it was natural to assume that they should have a controlling hand in determining his dealings with his neighbours. But the successful continuance of this dominant position would be practicable only as long as Russia desisted from expanding her influence or territorial possessions nearer the Afghan frontiers and the Amir had full confidence in the friendly intentions, implied or expressed, of the Government of India. The Amir had been restrained from taking any action against his neighbours, contrary to his ambitions or leanings. He had absolute faith in the goodwill of the Indian Government. But events subsequent to 1872, both in reference to Russia's aggression in Central Asia, and the Government of India's studied effort to demolish the illusions of Sher Ali, so well woven by Mayo's vague promises, made the Amir apprehensive of his security and anxious to stabilise his position.

The Russian recognition of the northern boundaries of Afghanistan made the British Government eager to secure their effective delimitation, which came to be the main object of later diplomatic negotiations. Meanwhile the same policy had been adopted in respect of Afghanistan's western boundary in which Persia was intimately interested. The laying down of the Seistan boundary with a view to preventing hostile relations between Persia and Afghanistan, and thereby freeing the latter from any possible encroachments of her western neighbour was an important step. Similarly, an effort was made to ensure the security of Kalat by delimiting her frontiers with Persia. This was not all. Kashgar-Yarkand was wooed as a friendly power and Russia was led to declare that principality outside her

1 Ibid., para 20.

2 Ibid.

sphere of influence. A series of politico-commercial dealings were entered into with that country so as to render her as effective a link in the chain against Russian penetration as Afghanistan or Kalat. Though her boundaries were not then defined, yet her position *vis-a-vis* the Government of India was fully recognised by Russia.

These developments in the three years after the assumption of Viceroyalty by Lord Mayo were directed towards strengthening the political and strategic position of the British empire in Asia by creating a belt of subsidized states which acted as buffers to absorb the hostile thrusts of Russia and to act as spearheads of British influence in Central Asia. The success was fully reflected in the foreign policy of the Government of India which was explicitly stated to be :

“We should establish with our Frontier States of Kalat, Afghanistan, Nepal and Burmah, and possibly at some future day with Yarkand, intimate relations of friendship, we should make them feel that, though we are all-powerful, we have no wish to encroach on their authority, but on the contrary, that our earnest desire is to support their power and maintain nationality ; and that if severe necessity arises, we might assist them with money, arms, and even perhaps in certain eventualities with men. We could thus create in these states outworks of our Empire, and by assuring them that the days of annexation are passed, make them practically feel that they have everything to gain and nothing to lose by endeavouring to deserve our favour and support . . . It may take years to develop this policy. It is contrary to what has been hitherto our course in India ; but if it is once established, recognised, and appreciated, our Empire would be comparatively secure.”



CHAPTER V

MAKRAN AND SEISTAN

THE policy outlined in the previous chapter necessitated the establishment of the fullest integrity of the frontier states against encroachment by the states beyond, so that the Indian and British governments could maintain their influence without being involved in military commitments for their security. The arrangement entered into with Russia was designed to strengthen the security of Afghanistan on her northern frontiers. But her western boundaries were undefined and exposed to the aggressive intentions of Persia. Similarly the state of Kalat which flanked the Indian frontiers on the Sind side and had entered into definite relations of alliance and support with the Government of India, had to be protected against attacks by the Persian empire. Both these questions assumed a grave aspect in the days of Lord Mayo, because Persia was forced by the gradual expansion of Russian influence in the Turkoman territory to seek compensation on her eastern frontier by incorporating regions on which she had traditional but shadowy claims. The Indian and British governments resorted to the mode of arbitration to delimit frontiers and thereby ensure peace.

The motive which prompted the Government of India to interfere actively in the disputes between Kalat and Persia or between Afghanistan and Persia was aptly stated in the despatch to the Secretary of State for India of 2nd September 1869 :

“We believe that the establishment by Persia of a frontier conterminous with that of the British empire in India, would be an event to be deeply deplored. We are of opinion that British interests, influence, and power in Asia are best secured by a steady and constant adherence to the policy of non-interference in the affairs of foreign states. As our western frontier is now situated, we are comparatively free from the necessity of frequent communication with Persia, Turkey, Russia or any great Asiatic power. It will ever be our object, by the cultivation of the most friendly relations with Kalat, Afghanistan and the minor nations and tribes on our border, to show them that from us they need have no fear of aggression, and that it is our policy and desire without making their neutrality the subject of treaty with any other power, to maintain their independence and secure for them a national existence. But if, without objection or effort on our part, a great power like

Persia should ever absorb the region lying between Scinde and Makran (desert and inhospitable though it may be), the safe and prudent policy which we deem essential to British interests would be rudely terminated."¹

As in the case of Russia the Government of India was keen to interpose a belt of "influenced and subsidized states" which would keep apart the frontiers of the two rival European empires, similarly against Persia also it was desired to prevent her from touching the borders of India by guaranteeing the independence of Kalat or Afghanistan. But the policy then pursued by Persia compelled Lord Mayo's government "to apprehend that it is the deliberate intention of the Persian Government to push, as far as possible to the east, her pretensions to empire."² Hence both interest and adherence to the plighted word compelled the Government of India to intervene in the disputes between Kalat and Persia and Kabul and Teheran, and propose the method of arbitration to secure the delimitation of frontiers and end anarchy and warfare on the western confines of India.

Kalat had entered into definite treaty relations with the Government of India and had consistently maintained an attitude of subordination and friendship. Soon after the annexation of Sind to the British dominions in India, a treaty was made in 1842 with the Khan of Kalat by which the Government of India engaged "In case of an attack on Meer Nazeer Khan by an open enemy or any difference arising between him and any foreign power to afford him assistance or good offices as it may judge to be necessary or proper for the maintenance of his rights."³ A second treaty was concluded in 1854 which, while omitting the words quoted above, made the alliance more definite. The Khan bound himself "to enter into no negotiations with other states" without the consent of the Government of India and agreed to the stationing of British troops or possible occupation by troops of portions of his territory.⁴ This made his position not unlike that of the Indian Princes with whom subsidiary alliances had been made in almost similar terms. The protection of Kalat, therefore, against any external aggression was a necessary obligation, and the Khan could, on his part, "expect in the event of any aggression on any one of those whom he conceived to be his tributaries" advice and

¹ Despatch to Secretary of State, Foreign Deptt. Secret. No. 8, 2 Sept., 1869, paras 16-20 S.I. Progs., 1869 No. 135.

² Ibid., para 22.

³ *Treaties and Engagements*, VII, p 76, quoted in Despatch to Secretary of State, 2 Sept., 1869, para 6.

⁴ Ibid.

protection from the Government of India. In the following years the relations thus established became closer still. It was an admitted fact that the Khan was not competent to enter into any negotiations with any state without the "consent of the British Government" but that he could seek aid from the Government of India against aggression on his territories in Makran, if such were not stopped by diplomatic action by the latter. In that eventuality Mayo rightly concluded that "we shall then in all probability be either forced to assist him actively against all our recent principles of policy, or, on the other hand, compelled to withhold our aid and leave a faithful ally to his fate, an alternative which would be very hurtful to our influence in the East, not only amongst our allies, but also our tributary States."¹ The Government of India did not envisage this last position with equanimity. Hence the only definite policy for them was to prevent aggressive expansion of the Persian empire towards Kalat and to prevent any encroachments either by force or by diplomacy.

Such a situation arose in 1869 when Ibrahim Khan of Bampur, ostensibly under the directions of Shah of Persia, advanced in force into Makran and laid claim to the territories of Kedj, Gwadur and Charbar. It appears that even Kalat was considered as part of the former possessions of the Persian empire. This aggressive move against the *de facto* possessions of the Amir of Kalat or his tributaries excited alarm and resentment, and evoked protests from the British officials then stationed in Makran to install the telegraph line. The Persian Foreign Office questioned the propriety of the conduct of the British officers and asserted claims to the territories under discussion and took its stand on the Telegraph Convention to justify the demand for Kedj, Gwadur and other territories in Makran. The Khan of Kalat was not prepared to accept Persian pretensions, and while advising his feudatory, the Chief of Kedj, to look to the Government of India for assistance, was prepared to resist encroachment even by force. A situation had developed which called for active interposition by the Indian Government in this dispute. The relations with Persia were not unfriendly but those with Kalat imposed the direct obligation of resolving the tangle by diplomatic methods, otherwise in case of conflict between the two states, the Government of India was liable to render military support to Kalat for fighting the Persian empire. The Government of India was in no mood to be involved in a conflict with Persia at a time when it was essential by all means to wean her

1 Despatch to Secretary of State, No. 22, 13 Nov., 1869, para 19, F.D.S.P Progs., 1869 No. 266.

from the influence of Russia. Neither policy nor interest justified war with Persia. On the other hand, Persia could not be "allowed to encroach step by step on the independent or semi-independent states," as Aitchison, Secretary to the Government of India at the time, put it, "between her frontiers and ours; and the Home Government might be urged to bring all possible pressure to bear on the Shah to have the disputes amicably adjusted."¹

The Government of India, on the basis of the reports made by Colonel Goldsmid in 1863, strongly held the view that "the boundaries of Persia on the Khelat border were undefined or uncertain; that Kedj. Punjgoor, Much, Urboo and Koolaj belonged to Khelat, and nine other provinces belonged to Persia either as tributaries or as subject to demands for tribute." They did not find any legal right or actual possession to "justify the local governors of the Shah in demanding tribute from the Naib of Kedj, or for the prosecution of warlike operations against that province, or against other tributaries of the Khan of Khelat."² Hence they desired the Government in England to remonstrate at Teheran most strongly against such conduct so as to prevent the Khan of Kalat with his tributaries on the Makran and Balooch coast being involved in open hostilities with Persia. Their positive proposal was that by negotiations between Persia and Her Majesty's Government a settlement should be effected of the eastern frontier of Persia, directed towards preventing aggression by Persian local governors against the territories of Kalat.³ An arbitration of the boundaries by the British Government was proposed. The Persian Government objected to British interference in this dispute. Thereupon the British Foreign Office, in January 1870, made a spirited protest in these words: "the British Government has treaty engagements with the Khan of Khelat, which do not admit of their regarding the condition of that state with indifference, and they cannot admit the principle that the British Government has no concern with the relations between Persia and Khelat. Nevertheless, the British Government will be always ready in a friendly spirit to assist in the arrangement of difficulties which may have arisen between the Shah and the Khan of Khelat."⁴ The Persian Foreign

¹ *Not on Persian Boundaries in Makran*, dated 6 Oct., 1869, S. I. 1869, Secret K. W. No. 265.

² Despatch to Secretary of State, 2 Sept. 1869, paras 10 and 13.

³ *Ibid.*, para 34.

⁴ Foreign Office to Thompson (Teheran), 6 Jan. 1870, F.D.S.H. Progs., 1870, No. 41.

Precis of Correspondence Perso-Khelat Boundary, Secret Progs., July 1871, No. 92.

Minister was definitely informed by the British envoy that the British Government had no intention to forgo the right of interference in the dispute between Persia and Kalat, but that "they were ready to use their friendly offices to avoid complications." This protest had its effect and the Shah of Persia suggested the mode of resolving the tangle. He wrote: "Respecting Khelat, the demarcation of boundaries between Persian Baloochistan and Khelat has not yet been clearly defined. If the British Government is desirous that the said line of frontier be traced, let commissioners be sent by the three parties to the frontier, *i.e.*, by England, Persia and Khelat, otherwise if the frontier is not defined, these difficulties may be daily arising." This proposal was agreed to by Her Majesty's Government and General Goldsmid was selected to proceed to the Makran frontier for the purpose.¹

The principle of defining the disputed boundary by the instrumentality of a joint commission of the three states having been accepted, the next step was to execute it. The procedure suggested by the Persian Government was that the Persian and British commissioners should proceed to Baluchistan, draw up the boundary between the two states on the map and then return to Teheran for the decision of the British and Persian governments. After protracted negotiations and owing to the stalemate in the Seistan boundary question, it was finally decided to take up the Makran arbitration as a priority and the commissioners proceeded to Bampur in January 1871. General Goldsmid was appointed to mediate and lay down the boundary on the map. His job was a tough one and made doubly so by the obstructiveness of the Persian commissioner. Ultimately, however, the General with the assistance of Major Lovett succeeded in laying down a provisional frontier line from Guattar to Kubak which was accepted by the Shah as it was believed to be favourable to him. Thus ended the dispute between Persia and Kalat, which was not deemed by the Shah to be of major importance, and paved the way for a more weighty arbitration of the Seistan boundaries under dispute between Persia and Afghanistan. The 1871 demarcation of Makran boundaries had not completed the line of Persian frontier towards the east. Hence a further Boundary Commission under Holdich became necessary in 1896 which defined the Persian frontier from Guattar to Seistan.³

The Makran boundary arbitration had been "undertaken for the purpose of settling all disputes as to boundary and

1 *Precis of Correspondence. Secret Progs.*, July 1871, No. 92.

2 Sykes; *History of Persia*, II, p. 363.

rights of sovereignty on the eastern frontier of Persia, and so removing the frequently recurring causes of alarm and irritation in those parts.”¹ On this principle, the need for settling the Perso-Afghan dispute about Seistan was imperative. The British Government was also under obligation to interfere in the matter under Article VI of the Treaty of Paris of 1857, contracted with Persia. But the chief impelling motive was that of maintaining the independence of Afghanistan, an essential concept of the policy of buffer states, which was likely to be endangered by the continued expansion of Persian territory towards the east. Strategic considerations were at the bottom of the Indo-British move at the time. The Government of India was fully conscious of the strategic importance of Seistan, which was the bone of contention between Persia and Afghanistan. They wrote on 7th July 1870, “In a strategic point of view the advance of Persia along the fertile valley of the Helmand, is a far more formidable menace to Afghanistan than her advance upon Herat, which the British Government has spent so much blood and money to counteract, and which was finally checked by the Treaty of Paris of March 1857.” This was no case of exaggerated apprehension. Persian advance up to the Helmand and her occupation of the whole of Seistan afforded her a convenient base of operations in a country of great fertility against any point of attack in Afghanistan. By this move not only was the security of Herat endangered but also the way was opened for easy movement against Kandahar and the Bolan Pass which might affect the safety of India ultimately. The Government of India had been long aware of it. They had dilated on the danger in their proceedings No. 196 of March 1869. The following extracts clearly explain their sense of danger :

“In a strategic sense, and with reference to the well-known ambition of Persia towards Afghanistan, her occupation of Hosseinabad is a flank movement of incalculable importance. By it she completely turns Herat, Furrah and Lash-Jowain, neutralises them, in short, without endangering her rear communications.

“Politically speaking, she lays the axe at the root of Afghan neutrality and independence, because in Seistan she holds a more dominating position than her possession of Herat and Furrah would have afforded her. The occupation of Kheirabad, about 40 or 50 miles higher up the Helmand, during the present year, will greatly consolidate these well-laid and ably-executed

1 Despatch to Secretary of State, No. 41, 7 July 1870, para 6, S. I. Progs., 1870, No. 325.

2 Despatch, No. 41, 7 July 1870, para 3.

plans; and there can be no doubt that such will take place unless some powerful preventive be immediately interposed.

“The present information dispels at once the idea so long prevalent, that impassable deserts interpose an insuperable barrier between Persia and Kalat. On the contrary, the facts under report show that from a base in Persian Khorassan, which is a highly productive country, a large army can advance by water for nearly 200 miles to Kheirabad, whence to Kandahar is only 150 miles or the Bolan, 230, both routes being well watered and supplied.”¹

Therefore it was inconceivable that the Government of India should allow their apple-cart of Central Asian policy to be upset by any foolish sentimentalism or inadequate appreciation of the situation. The independence and strength of Afghanistan or Kalat was the *sine qua non* of the security of India. Russia or Persia could not be permitted to encroach within this fold or even to undermine, by any ingenious moves, the invulnerability of this ring fence. As Persia's infiltration into Seistan or Makran was calculated to weaken this outer defence of India, the Government of India was unable to permit the Seistan question to be settled merely on the basis of existing facts in favour of Persia. They laid emphasis on their established policy which alone should determine their attitude towards the Seistan problems. They wrote, “the policy which we have for so many years pursued of securing the independence of Afghanistan and the provinces dependent on it against the encroachment of Persia, should be allowed full weight in the consideration of the case . . . We think it would be most undesirable that Persia should be allowed to cross the Helmand at any point and we consider it absolutely essential to the security of Afghanistan that, from the points where the river turns into the territories now in the possession of Afghanistan, the Ameer's possession of both banks of the river should be maintained.”² They drew attention, in order to reiterate their policy, to the enunciation of policy by Lord Malmesbury in 1852, when Her Majesty's Government had announced the distinct determination not to allow “any systematic attempt on the part of Persia to effect a change in the state of possession in the countries lying between the Persian frontier and the British territories in India.”³ The same policy was re-stated by Lord Cowley in 1856 when he told the Persian plenipotentiary that the British

1 Quoted in Despatch No. 41, 7 July 1870, para 4 (margin).

2 Despatch No. 41, 7 July 1870, para 5.

3 Lord Malmesbury's Despatch to Colonel Sheil, 27 Oct. 1852, quoted in Despatch No. 41 of 1870.

Government was "determined that Persia should not disturb the existing state of the tribes on the eastern frontier." This policy that Persia should not be allowed to encroach on the territories of Afghanistan or the possessions of the tribes in that quarter was enunciated by the Government of India as being the basis of their attitude towards the Seistan question, and they desired Her Majesty's Government to adopt it as the basis of their arbitration in the dispute between Persia and Afghanistan.¹

It will be unnecessary here to enter into the past history of the province of Seistan or into the legal niceties of right and possession as regards the conflicting claims of Persia and Afghanistan over Seistan. It will be sufficient to say that this province had been laid claim to both by Persia and Afghanistan over a long series of years; the validity of the claims of one being denied by the other. Prior to 1863, it appears a large slice of Seistan owed allegiance to Afghanistan, being part of the province of Kandahar. It is stated that in 1856, just before the commencement of the war between Persia and Afghanistan when the siege of Herat was on, the Shah sent a force to Seistan, but it does not seem to have remained there. During the reign of Dost Muhammad, Afghanistan had continued to keep her hold over Seistan. His son Muhammad Shareef Khan had moved into the province in 1860, ostensibly to punish certain Baluchis settled there who had committed robberies in the Kandahar territory. The jealousy and anxiety of the Teheran Government had been excited by this event; Persia made a protest but "desisted from formally occupying the province" "with the sole view of being agreeable to the British Government." While Persia had never resigned her right to this territory she had not been in a position to contest its possession with Dost Muhammad. On his death, however, when Kabul was distracted by the civil war, the Shah's cupidity was aroused and he sought to acquire possession of Seistan. On the plea that Seistan must be protected against the incursions of Afghanistan, he desired interference from the British Government in the matter.

The disputes between Persia and Afghanistan were covered by Article VI of the Treaty of Paris concluded in March 1857 between Persia and Great Britain. This article declared that, "in case of differences arising between the Government of Persia and the countries of Herat and Afghanistan, the Persian Government engage to refer them for adjustment to the friendly offices of the British Government and not to take up arms unless those friendly offices fail of effect. The British Government on

¹ Despatch No. 41, 7 July 1870.

their part engage at all times, to exert their influence with the States of Afghanistan to prevent any cause of umbrage being given by them or by any of them to the Persian Government; and the British Government, when appealed to by the Persian Government in the event of difficulties arising, will use their best endeavours to compose such differences in a manner just and honourable to Persia." This treaty had not been known to the ruler of Kabul, but by the treaties of 1855 and 1857 friendly relations had been established between the Amir and the Government of India. It would have been quite natural for the British Government, in view of the relations with the two governments, and particularly at a time when Afghanistan was in no position to safeguard her interests by force of arms, to resort to peaceful methods of adjustment of the dispute. But in 1863, the British Foreign Office was in the grip of the theory of non-intervention. Lord Russell, with the concurrence of Sir Charles Wood, contrary to the spirit of the Treaty of 1857, wrote in reply to the appeal of the Persian Government that "Her Majesty's Government being informed that the title to the territory of Seistan is disputed between Persia and Afghanistan, must decline to interfere in the matter, and must leave it to both parties to make good their possessions by force of arms."

Upon this refusal to interfere, Persia asserted her claims by force of arms, and taking advantage of the confusion in Afghanistan, occupied within a few years a large part of Western Seistan. The Government of India had no information of the actual developments and were not supposed to have recognised these acquisitions. But Persia did not long remain in undisputed possession of her forcibly acquired property. When Sher Ali emerged from the throes of civil war and was in a position to assert his rights, he was in no mood to let an important strategic area as this be controlled by Persia. In Kabul there was great resentment against these Persian appropriations in Seistan, and the Amir was prepared to make good his claim by force of arms. Conflict was imminent because of the constant raids against Kandahar territories directed by Mir Alum Khan of Qain who governed the Persian portion of Seistan. The Governors of Furrah and Kuchansoor complained of repeated encroachments, and at one stage in 1869, the Governor of Herat was prepared to despatch a strong force for the defence of Furrah. But Amir Sher Ali countermanded it by directing that "he should not interfere with the foreign border tribes further than to protect his frontier strictly from their attacks, until suitable arrangements are made in consultation with the British Government." It

is clear from the Kabul Diaries of this period that while Sher Ali was keen to re-establish his possession over Seistan, and refused to acknowledge Persian right there, he was not prepared to resort to any action without the advice and approval of the Government of India. This was so because of the earlier discussions at Ambala in 1869. The Amir realised that peace would hardly be secured in that area unless Seistan was reattached to Afghanistan. For this there were two alternatives, either negotiations between the British Government and the Shah of Persia, or a detachment of Kabul troops or levies "to proceed aggressively or offensively towards Seistan." But in spite of his capacity to take violent action, he had desisted from all active interposition beyond charging his frontier governors to "arrange for the strict protection of their frontier in order to save their people from the oppression of their adversaries." He was prepared to do nothing without the advice of the British Government and had "expressed himself desirous of peace and settling the Seistan dispute by peaceful negotiation." But this attitude was unlikely to continue unless some action was taken by the Government of India to prevent the raids.¹

It is evident from the attitude of the Kabul Government that the Amir would resort to force only as the last alternative and that he would be prepared to abide by the decision of the Government of India in the matter. On the other hand, the Persian Government was apprehensive of Kabul's hostility which it was unable to counteract easily, and was inclined to employ the good offices of the British Government to retain possession of Seistan. The Government of India did not want war between the two, but was not eager to let Persia approach the Helmand or encroach on the important strategic areas bordering on Indian frontiers. The stage was therefore set for another arbitration to determine the boundaries between two neighbours having conflicting interests. The Government of India was no longer pledged to a policy of absolute inactivity, rather it was keen to establish its friendly influence over states controlling strategic areas near the frontiers in order to strengthen them as the first ring of defence against Russian threat. Thus, when the Persian Government requested the British Government to "use its influence with the Ameer to prevent him from carrying his supposed intentions into effect," the British Government was prepared to act in accordance with Article VI of the Treaty of Paris to adjust the differences. The Shah was prepared to

¹ Aitchison's Note on Seistan Affairs dated 3 April 1870; K.W.S.I. Progs., 1870 Nos. 292-321; also Note, 6 June 1870; Memorandum by Mayo, 20 May 1870, S.H.Progs., 1870 No. 110, K.W.

accept the arbitration thus proposed, but he took his stand on Lord Russell's communication of 1863¹ and did not wish to submit the territories then acquired for arbitration. The Persian Government wrote in their memorandum of 19th April 1870, that "although they consider that the question of Seistan was settled according to the purport of Lord Russell's despatch yet, having full reliance in the justice of the British Government, they are willing to make Her Majesty's Ministers arbitrators in the matter of the sovereignty and boundaries of Seistan in order that nothing may occur to disturb tranquillity on the frontiers of Persia and Afghanistan, provided that Russell's despatch remains in full force."² The Government of India did not accept this basis for, as Aitchison wrote, it would have involved recognition of Persian operations under Russell's letter and would have prevented Afghanistan from resorting to the same method to restore the *status quo*. He further stated "It seems to me quite clear that we cannot interfere to prevent Persia from suffering the consequences of her occupation without taking the justice of that occupation into consideration and decision; and that, therefore, if we mediate at all, it cannot be on the ground put forward by Persia that she is to retain all she took under cover of Lord John Russell's letter, but only on the ground that the justice of her aggression is to come under review."³ His contention, therefore, was that "unless Persia withdraw the reservation as to Lord John Russell's letter . . . we cannot offer to arbitrate, but must leave the two countries to the terms of the letter, viz., to make good their possession by force of arms."⁴ The Government of India insisted that arbitration must be on the basis of the Treaty of Paris and the whole of Seistan should be the subject of such mediation. The Persian Government seems to have acquiesced in this view and General Goldsmid was appointed to arbitrate.

In the instructions issued to him the procedure was defined. He was appointed as the Agent of the British Government "to conduct certain important negotiations with respect to the definition of boundaries." The first object [of his mission] was "to ascertain the actual territory which Persia had acquired" since 1863. He was to be assisted by the Persian and Afghan commissioners. After examination of the disputed territory he was next to lay down upon a skeleton map "not only the line of frontier as determined by actual possession at the present

1. See ante p. 60

2. *Precis—Seistan Boundary, Secret Progs.*, July 1871, No. 93.

3. Aitchison's Note, dated 6 June 1870 *op. cit.*

4. *Ibid*

time, but also the two lines of frontier which would have to be respectively assigned if the claims of either one party or the other were admitted to their full extent." He was to record evidence on the spot as regards ancient rights and actual possession. Then he was to discuss the whole question with the representatives of the two governments and formally deliver his judgment. The British Government further apprised him of their views in respect of the Persian contention based on Lord Russell's letter of 1863. They held that the letter did not invest Persian acquisitions with any British recognition as such, "overriding all ancient rights that may be asserted and established by Afghanistan." General Goldsmid was given "the sole power of arbitration" whose decision was to be that of the British Government.¹ Every care was taken to establish the impartiality of the arbitrator. But it is clear from these instructions that the swing was towards Afghanistan.

Arbitration in this case had been desired by Persia owing to her fear of Afghan aggression in Seistan. The Shah had invoked the good offices of the British Government to prevent the Amir from asserting his right of wresting back by force what he had lost during the period of civil war. It is clear from the contemporary records² that but for his regard for the friendship of the Government of India and Mayo's exhortation to him to desist from aggression, Sher Ali would have resorted to the arbitrament of the sword, as Persia did in 1863, to retrieve his possessions in Seistan. Sher Ali had no knowledge of the treaty under which arbitration was effected and was not a party to it. The arbitration may have been binding on Persia, once the Shah accepted it, in spite of his insistence on Russell's letter, but it was not sought by Afghanistan and the Amir's acquiescence was merely a gesture of goodwill to the Government of India and a consequence of the relations established between the two as a result of the Ambala Conference in 1869. Sher Ali had faith in the new friendship and believed that his interests would be upheld by his ally. He had at this time implicit confidence in the good intentions of the Government of India and was prepared to abide by their judgment as to his dealings with his neighbours, whether Bokhara, Russia or Persia. It was against this background of treaty obligation on the one hand and belief in the friendly intentions on the other that mediation was effected. The arbitrator was keen on absolute justice and impartiality, and tried to be fair to both parties, with the

1. Introductions to General Goldsmid, 9 Aug. 1870. S.H. Pogs., 1870.

2. For Seisian Arbitration question refer to the Govt. of India despatches No. 39 of 1870, No. 41 dated 7 July 1870, and S.H. anul S.I. Progs., 1870.

result that a middle line was considered to be the best course. But it failed to satisfy either party. Persia was reluctant to part with the territory acquired, while Afghanistan made a grievance of being deprived of her ancient rights which were considered to extend to the whole of Seistan. The Government of India was also not happy with the solution for it was bound to react adversely on the framework of their policy of making Afghanistan the bastion of their defence organisation against future aggressions of Russia. The British Government was keen on the friendship of Persia in order to keep her out of the Russian camp. The Seistan Award was thus merely an instrument for promoting the policy of forming an iron ring of friendly but dependent states round Russia and thus bottle her up within her limits in Central Asia.

CHAPTER VI

KASHGAR

COMMERCE and strategy were the twin motives which prompted British interest in the affairs of Yarkand-Kashgar. North of the great Himalayan range, Yarkand had been for ages the chief emporium where caravans of merchants from all the surrounding countries met. It was situated on the great highway to China and attracted merchants from Badakshan, Bokhara, Russian provinces of Central Asia and China. Though separated by high mountains, Yarkand had been in trade connection with India through Ladakh. The wish to capture the commerce of this golden land and the impelling desire to keep off Russia from the markets there, led to the opening of relations with the new ruler of Kashgar in the late sixties of the nineteenth century. But commerce was not the sole purpose. The strategic importance of Yarkand, particularly at a time when the Russian menace loomed large, influenced diplomacy. It was the third sheet in the defensive armour of India. Kalat and Afghanistan, the other two, had been brought definitely within the British sphere of influence. Yarkand alone provided a chink through which the Russian threat, however remote, could materialise. Hence the Government of India was keen to establish definite friendly relations with the ruler there and thus close all avenues of hostile approach to India.

In an earlier chapter has been described the inevitability of Russian advance eastwards in Central Asia and the Russian efforts to bring Yarkand within the orbit of their influence. It may be necessary here to relate the story of the rise of Yakoob Beg to sovereignty and his dealings with his two imperial neighbours, Russia and Britain, in order to understand their reaction on the policy of the Government of India.

Yarkand acknowledged some sort of allegiance to the Khans of Zungaria. Thus when the Chinese Emperor Chien-Lung (1736-1796) invaded Zungaria, conquered it in the eighteenth century, his sovereignty as a matter of course extended to the country of Yarkand whose principal cities were garrisoned by the Chinese forces. Manchu rule over a century was not free from the threat of hostile projects engineered by the Khojas, the descendants of the dispossessed rulers of the

country, who made repeated attempts "to recover their lost patrimony" from their refuge in Khokand, presumably with the aid of the rulers of that country. The last of such efforts was that by Vali Khan Turra in 1857, who was able to hold Kashgar and rule it for some months till he was driven out by the Chinese. Prior to that a more successful attempt had been that of Jehangir Khan in 1825, which had aroused "profound sensation throughout Central Asia." In 1864, however, more hopeful opportunity came for the people of Eastern Turkistan to throw off the Chinese yoke. In July that year, a band of Tungans came from Urumchi to foment risings against the Manchu dynasty. This revolt of the Muslim population was widespread comprising the western provinces of China, Zungaria and Yarkand. The Chinese empire was unable to suppress it owing to the distance and the apparently popular nature of the revolt. Kucha, Yarkand, Khotan and Kashgar fell one by one to the Khojas, the Chinese garrison being cut to pieces at every place. Kucha and Yarkand were held by Rashid-ud-deen while Khotan elected Haji Habibullah as its ruler. Before Kashgar was occupied by Rashid, Bazurg Khan arrived from Khokand with a following of 500 men and Yakoob Beg Kushbegi, the Commander-in-Chief of Khokand forces. He was hailed by the Muslim population there and was soon able to liquidate the Chinese garrison. Bazurg Khan, however, proved to be a worthless debauchee who was content to transfer the burden of administration to Yakoob Beg. The Kushbegi soon became master of the situation and acquired control over Khotan, Yarkand and Kucha, the three important cities of Kashgaria. He captured Yarkand in April 1866, and by the end of 1867 had completely subdued the country, Habibullah Khan being subjugated by stratagem. Yakoob Beg was thus able to establish a united control over the whole of Eastern Turkistan by expelling the Chinese power and combining the Muslim population under his rule. The next problem for him was to strengthen his kingdom both against the restoration of Chinese authority and the aggressiveness of the fast expanding Russian empire.¹

The Chinese danger was for the time being remote² but the

1 Pol. A. Progs., March 1863, No. 7. The Amir of Bokhara acknowledged him as Atalik Ghazi—The establishment of Yakoob Beg's rule over Kashgaria and the spreading of the disturbances to Ili brought the Russians upon the scene and they intimated the Chinese empire of their intention to occupy Ili till the rebellion was subdued. Craven & Hall, *An Outline History of China*, p. 285.

The Imperial Government in China was slow in taking action, but General Tso Tsuang-Tang was commissioned to restore Manchu sway in Kashgaria, which he accomplished in 1878, Ibid. p. 285.

Russian threat was close at the door. From the very outset of his career as the ruler of Yarkand-Kashgar, Yakoob Beg or Atalik Ghazi, as he was generally known, appears to have been distasteful to the Russian authorities. Presumably, there were two reasons for this; firstly, the reluctance of Yakoob Beg to allow unrestrained ingress for the Russian trade and secondly, his desire to be independent of Russian suzerainty which would seek to hold him in feudal ties as the erstwhile dependent of the Khan of Khokand, a subsidiary state of the Russian empire. By the Treaty of Peking with the Chinese empire in 1860, the Russians had gained the right of freedom of trade in Eastern Turkistan. They were therefore not prepared to submit to any restrictions whatsoever and took their stand on the treaty stipulations. Yakoob did not hold himself liable to the undertakings accepted by the dispossessed government, and was not prepared to permit free entry of Russian merchants in the interest of his own security. His attitude was substantially antagonistic to the whole trend of Russian policy and design in Central Asia. If commerce was the Russian primary motive, and if the opening of the ancient trade route to China their object, Yakoob's rise blocked their further advance. According to Boulger, "it was only when a powerful Mohamedan state was erected in Eastern Turkestan, and threatened both the independence of Ili, and also to raise up disunion in Khokand, that Russia was compelled to consider what policy it would be wise to adopt towards the recently proclaimed Atalik Ghazi."¹ It is no wonder, then, that there was no love lost between him and the Russians. But as has been mentioned in an earlier chapter, dealings between the two states had commenced early and culminated in a Treaty of Commerce negotiated by Baron Kaulbar in 1872.² However, the terms of this engagement remained abortive initially. The Russians on their part were not prepared to give him recognition, but were instigating the Khan of Khokand to hostility, and were prepared to assist China to restore her sovereignty. Yakoob, on the other hand, is reported to have been the primary motive force in the instigation of revolt against Russia and to have offered support to the Amir of Bokhara. It is unnecessary here to enter into this tangled skein of intrigues, charges and counter-charges and diplomatic exchanges. Suffice it to say that for more than five years Yakoob Beg successfully resisted all efforts to bring him within the sphere of Russian political influence.

The beginnings of British connection with Yarkand were

¹ Boulger, *Life of Yakoob Beg*, p. 176.

² Baron Kaulbar's Mission (April 1872). F.D.S.P. 1874, Aug. Nos. 205-7

commercial. In 1862, Davies reported on the possibilities of trade with Kashmir and Yarkand-Kashgar. He held the view "that British goods from India had a very fair chance of under-selling Russian goods in Eastern Turkestan," and pointed out "that the routes by Leh to Yarkand and Khotan were the most direct."¹ But when this initial proposal was made there were two serious obstacles to the prosecution of commerce. Firstly, Eastern Turkistan was still governed by the Chinese who were opposed to the penetration of their country by European commerce. Secondly, the Maharaja of Kashmir had imposed almost prohibitive transit duties on trade through his state. Both these factors made the immediate opening of commercial relations with Yarkand impossible. But preliminary steps had been then taken which facilitated later progress. Sir Robert Montgomerie, Lieutenant-Governor of the Panjab, had considerably improved the road through the Kangra region to Ladakh and had built bridges across the Chandrabhaga and Sutlej rivers. In 1864, the Kashmir difficulty was resolved by an agreement with the Maharaja for reducing the tariff on English imports and the transit duties "on the condition that the Maharaja should receive compensation amounting to one-half of any loss of revenue which might be caused to him." Every care was taken to see that the agreement was observed in reality. At the same time, earnest efforts were made by Dr. Cayley, Assistant Commissioner in Ladakh, to improve the routes and encourage Yarkand's merchants visiting Leh to trade with India. But the most helpful event which provided stimulus to this move was the revolt in Eastern Turkistan in 1864 and the consequent abrogation of Chinese rule. By 1866-67, Yakoob Beg had become master of the territories and with him, it was believed, trade relations would easily be established.

Early in 1865 on 13th January, Dr. Cayley proposed sending an accredited envoy to Yarkand "to conclude a friendly alliance with the Kushbegi, in order to give him a true and just idea of our wishes and intentions." He further wrote, "There is no doubt that he is most anxious to be on friendly terms with us, but is very suspicious of our motives, as he now only hears false and garbled accounts of our policy." Soon after, the Panjab Government reinforced the suggestion of opening trade. The Lieutenant-Governor wrote that a favourable opportunity had arrived "for adopting all the measures that may be feasible or advisable for fully opening up and extending this trade. The

¹ British Relations with Kashmir and Yarkand. F.D.S.P. 1874 Aug. Nov. 205-7.

jealousy which characterised the Chinese rule no longer exists. It appears certain that the present ruler is most anxious to promote trade and cultivate friendly relations. The traders themselves have afforded every assurance in person that they are eager to extend their operations."¹ This view of Dr. Cayley and the Panjab Government that "this is a good opportunity for an attempt on the part of the Indian Government to enter into friendly relations with the new kingdom of Yarkand," was further confirmed by the report of Mr. Shaw who visited Yarkand in that year. But the most important contribution to the initiation of relations with that country was that of Douglas Forsyth, the Commissioner of Jullundur. Apart from contacting the Yarkand merchants and studying the possibilities of India-Yarkand trade, he had persuaded the Panjab Government and the Government of India to take early steps in the matter. His note to the Governor-General, dated 7th October 1868, was a most comprehensive and reasoned survey of the problem.² In his suggestion to secure contact with Yarkand-Kashgar, he was impelled by considerations, both of commerce and strategy. He indicated the potentialities of tea trade with these regions and also the possibilities of export of cotton. From his own personal knowledge of these regions he discounted the difficulties of communication which he did not consider insuperable. Tea could be cultivated in the Himalayas and could become an article of profit in Central Asia and even in Russia. But it was more for its strategic consequences that he desired to open effective relations with Yakoob Beg Kushbegi.

Forsyth ridiculed the notion, then held by many, of the impossibility of Russian advance towards India elsewhere than from the Oxus southwards through Afghanistan, and the non-possibility "of any danger coming to us from the spread of their influence eastward from the Syr Daria." He dilated on the Russian attempts to secure ingress into Eastern Turkistan and particularly their endeavour to establish a cantonment at Gumah, a place between Yarkand and Khotan, at the commencement of the road to Karakoram and Changchinmoo, for which they had sought Chinese permission in 1859. From this fact and the general Russian interest in opening the country of Yarkand-Kashgar, he concluded that there was danger to the integrity of that state and that the establishment of Russian power in Kashgar and Yarkand would adversely affect British interests in India and their security. He did not endorse the view of the

1 British Relations with Kashmir and Yarkand. F.D.S.P. 1874 Aug. Nos. 205-7. Also G.J. Aldeo : British India Northern Frontier, Ch. II.

2 Pol. Progs., Nov. 1868, No. 3.

impassability of the Himalayas and, on the basis of his knowledge of the routes through Ladakh, made the categorical statement that "in real sober truth, India is more vulnerable by Russia on the north than on any other side. For whereas if she approached India through Afghanistan she would have to traverse a poor and probably hostile country, far from her supports, on the north she would step from the rich country of Turkistan at once within the red line which bounds British territory. It is not necessary to suppose that Russia would march all through Cashmere and pour her troops through the Pir Punjal Passes into the plains of the Panjab; when she touches Ladakh, she virtually attacks India. Cashmere would then have to be protected, and we should find that province, even supposing every man in it to be loyal, a source of weakness, and not an element of strength." Furthermore, even if invasion might not be deemed an imminent possibility, the fact that Russia would have a garrison at Gumah and hold the passes to Ladakh would have a deleterious effect on morale in India. But the greatest danger which he apprehended was that in a European complication, in a conflict between Russia and England the former would, from that advantageous position, by threatening India, "prevent England from freeing any of her troops so as to take part in the European war." The Government of India would also have to enhance defensive arrangements on that side, for the road from Yarkand to Ladakh was "perfectly easy and almost level." It was not an actual invasion against which provision might have to be made as on the Afghanistan side, yet there could be trouble enough.¹

In view of these potentialities of danger, Forsyth desired to anticipate the Russians in Yarkand, by using the pretence of commerce and establishing British political influence over YakooB Beg. Even commerce was not feasible unless effective steps were taken to ensure the stability of the kingdom of Atalik Ghazi by eliminating the threat of Russian aggression. The one means suggested for this was to arrange with Russia for the recognition of YakooB Beg "as an independent power," a course similar to that pursued towards Kalat or Afghanistan. Trade was the motive but that was unlikely to materialise unless the political objective of bringing Yarkand within the British sphere of influence had been achieved by securing Russian recognition for it.

Sir John Lawrence, Governor-General of India, did not take up with alacrity these proposals, though he was prepared

¹ Forsyth's Note, 7 Oct. 1868.

to dissociate the commercial proposition from the political one and to sanction a sum of money for the development of a road to Ladakh.¹ The Secretary of State sanctioned such expenditure and expressed his interest in the project.² However, the Government of India did not develop any positive policy towards Kashgat and Forsyth's suggestions did not evoke much response. Lawrence, in his last days of Indian administration, was not prepared to embark on an adventurous role. The views of Forsyth, however, were not contrary to his political creed, for they involved merely the attempt to secure recognition of the independence of Kashgar-Yarkand from the Russian empire and opening of close commercial and diplomatic relations with YakooB Beg. In the days of Lord Mayo, the matter was not left to cool down, but active steps were taken to bring Yarkand into closer relations with India.

YakooB Beg had genuine apprehensions of Russian hostility and appears to have been inclined in the earlier stages to secure assistance from the Government of India and enter into closer friendly relations with the British. But he could not altogether afford to alienate the Russians. Thus we find his envoys being sent both to India as well as to Russia and his readiness to accept envoys in response at his capital. At the close of 1869, Mirza Shadi, an envoy from the Kushbegi, arrived in India and had an interview with Lord Mayo on 28th March, 1870.³ The envoy had been commissioned to get a clear view of the objects and intentions of the Government of India in their desire to open trade with his country. But it is apparent from the record of his interview with the Viceroy that his mission was not without a political objective. He wanted permission to purchase arms and ammunition in India, to secure artisans for the manufacture of arms and ammunition, etc., in Kashgar and to invite a British envoy to visit his capital. But the most important matter which he discussed was that of the possible attitude which his ruler should adopt towards Russia. It may be relevant here to mention the policy of the Government of India towards YakooB Beg, which may be gleaned from the Viceroy's replies to Mirza Shadi.

The Viceroy assured the envoy that his only object in opening the route through the Changchinmoo, was to "afford greater facilities for the protection, freedom and encouragement

1 Seton-Karr to Thornton, No. 1254, 28 Oct. 1868, Pol. Progs., Nov. 1868, No. 4.

2 Despatch from Secretary of State, No. 44, 25 Feb. 1869.

3 Memorandum of the interview. Pol. A. Progs., June 1870, No. 215.

of trade." Commerce was the chief motive of British policy and for that every measure was then being taken. Lord Mayo, however, was not prepared to supply munitions of war on behalf of his government, but he was willing to render every assistance to the envoy in "making purchases in the public market," for which no obstacles were imposed. Even old arms of the government might be purchased. Similarly, in respect of the service of artisans from India, while the government could not directly send any or "order any" to go, the envoy was promised full liberty to take such as would be willing to go. More substantial and direct was, however, the assurance to train young Yarkandis in the art of working in iron, etc., a concession which, if availed of, was likely to encourage the manufacture of arms and ammunition in Yarkand itself. The Viceroy did not also seem to have any objection to the demand to send a British officer to Yarkand, if his safety was guaranteed.

The attitude of the Government of India was made clear on the last request of the envoy for advice as to dealings with Russia. The envoy gave an account of the extension of Russian territories up to the river Naryn which was the boundary of Yarkand to the north, and also mentioned the railways which were then being built by Russia in Central Asia. He expressed the fear that as soon as Russia had completed the railways they would lay hands on Yarkand. He pointed out further that Yakoob Beg had till then taken no action to intensify antagonism with Russia though he had received letters from Bokhara and Khokand promising support to him, in his struggle with the Russian empire. Lord Mayo, true to the policy which had been enunciated by his predecessor and which he had applied in the case of Afghanistan in the previous year, advised that the "Atalik Ghazee should strengthen his internal government, look well to the defence of his frontier, arm well and train his soldiers, and above all, carefully abstain from interfering in quarrels beyond his boundary, and furnishing a pretext for attacking him by aggressions on his neighbours." The Viceroy advised that if he would abstain from aggression beyond his frontiers, he would be free from interference by Russia for which a guarantee might be forthcoming as in the case of Afghanistan. But so far as any positive action by the Government of India was concerned, the Viceroy left no doubt of his absolute inability to render any active assistance to the Kushbegi. Lord Mayo told the envoy "that nothing would induce him to send a single soldier across the frontier to give help in any wars or quarrels that might arise ; that all he could do was to give friendly advice which might or might not be

followed ; that Russia was closely united in friendship with the British Government, and he would be most happy to represent to Russia the peaceful wishes and policy of the Atalik Ghazee, and urge the propriety of not interfering with him ; but beyond that he could promise nothing." He tried to silence the fears of the envoy by representing that Russia was seeking to establish trade routes via the Caspian and the Oxus rather than build railways.

The Government of India decided to send Douglas Forsyth to Yarkand along with the envoy, and Lord Mayo mentioned it in his letter to Yakoob Beg.¹ It is clear from the instructions to Forsyth that the sole purpose of his visit was "to secure peaceful and friendly intercourse with the Ruler of Yarkand" and that the main object was to establish trade relations. This visit was "not in any sense a mission, and has no political object." Forsyth was, therefore, definitely instructed "to abstain from taking any part whatever in the political questions that may be agitated or disputes that may arise further than conveying to Atalik Ghazee the general advice already given to him by the Viceroy."²

This early mission, though fully restricted in its scope, did not meet with success, for Atalik Ghazi was not then in Yarkand but was engaged in warfare at a distance of 700 miles. Forsyth had therefore to return to India without achieving any results except that of securing the goodwill of the merchants and officials in Yarkand. Yakoob Beg was reported to be actually sorry for his absence from the capital.³ It is true that it was mere coincidence that Yakoob had to be away on a military expedition, but it might be surmised that the hollow nature of the mission might also have deterred him from being expeditious in returning to the capital. But the series of exchanges of envoys did not end here. Another envoy soon came to India, and Forsyth was sent again with more definite objects and instructions.

Yakoob Beg sent Ahrai Khan Turra to India at the end of 1871 with letters to the Viceroy and the Queen of England in which he desired that "the practice of deputing envoys may not be discontinued."⁴ But no British officer was immediately despatched, which is reported to have caused disappointment to him. For a year after this no definite contact appears to

1 Viceroy to Atalik Ghazee, 4 April 1870, Pol.A.Progs., June 1870, No. 216.

2 Aitchison to Thornton, No. 5A, 14 April 1870. Pol. A. Progs., 1870, No. 219.

3 British Relations with Kashmir and Yarkand. F.D.S.P. Aug. 1874, Nos. 205-7.

4 F.D.S.P. 1874, Aug. Nos. 205-7.

have been maintained, and presumably the negotiations between Kashgar and Russia during the interval might have been responsible for it. In June 1872, Yakoob Beg was led to sign a treaty of commerce with Russia. But from his general attitude towards that country, it appeared unlikely that he should resign himself to absolute dependence on an expanding imperialism. Hence he might have, as a counter-acting measure, desired to renew contact with India. At the beginning of the year 1873, again, Syed Yakub Khan, who was proceeding on a mission to Constantinople, presented himself to the Viceroy as envoy from Atalik Ghazi. The items which he was commissioned to offer related to the providing of "fullest facilities for the promotion of commercial intercourse" and the exchange of diplomatic missions between the two countries. Kashgar was prepared to establish a permanent representative at the Indian court, while the Government of India was requested to send an envoy in the company of Syed Yakub Khan on his return. The Viceroy readily agreed to these requests and decided to send Douglas Forsyth on a second visit to Kashgar which he made in the winter of 1873-74.¹

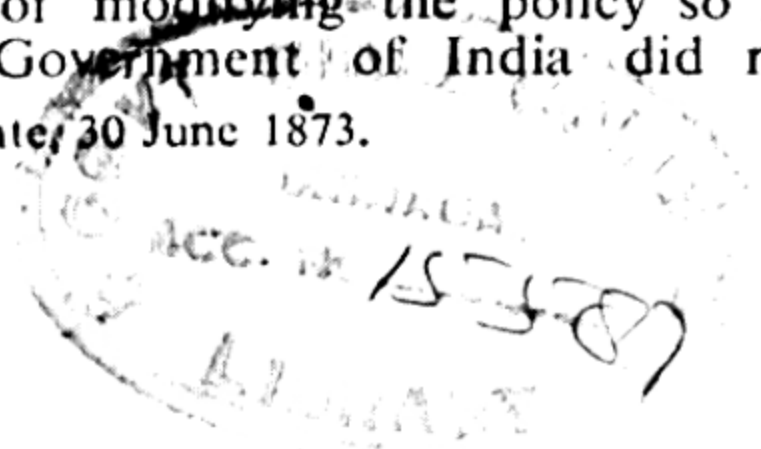
A reference to the course of Russian policy towards Yakoob Beg and his reactions to it will help to project in bold outline the motives prompting his approach to India. It has been widely mentioned by Russian writers that the Kushbegi from the outset of his new career had evinced signs of hostility to the Russians and imposed all sorts of obstructions on their trade with his country. The reason for this attitude is not far to seek. The aggressive character of Russian expansion in Central Asia, their hold on the ruler of Khokand and the existence of a treaty with the Chinese empire by which the Russians could, as a matter of right, claim commercial privileges in Eastern Turkistan, made them positively dangerous for the integrity and stability of the infant state of Yarkand. Moreover, the conduct of Kaufmann in the period immediately following his accession did not help to silence the fears of Yakoob Beg. The construction of a fort at Naryn and the forcing of Russian traders, on the basis of their treaty with China, as well as the humiliating treatment afforded to the communications of Yakoob Beg, were not factors which could assure him of the pacific and friendly intentions of the Russian empire. It was also widely rumoured that Russia had offered military assistance to China for the reconquest of Yarkand. Constant tension on his frontier owing to the

¹ F.D.S.P. 1874, Aug., Nos. 206-7.

presence of Russian forces, and the thinly screened assistance to frontier tribes to revolt against his authority were not measures which could easily convince Atalik Ghazi of Russian *bona fides*. Kaufmann from the very beginning had set his heart on securing a treaty of trade with Kashgar, which was to be similar in scope to the one entered into with Khokand and which, in effect, would have made Yakoob Beg a mere subordinate feudatory of the Russian empire. The terms demanded of him were "the free and unrestricted passage of merchants to all the towns of Kashgar," the establishment of caravanserais, the appointment of commercial agents, a uniform rate of taxation of $2\frac{1}{2}$ per cent, and a free passage to the neighbouring countries. Yakoob Beg had been ostensibly playing for time and he sent two envoys to Tashkand and St. Petersburg to put off the evil day. Meanwhile he made an approach to India. But ultimately he was compelled by the mission of Baron Kaulbar in 1872 to submit to the Russian demands and sign the treaty of commerce. This treaty had come after the visit of Mirza Shadi and Ahrai Khan Turra to India and the abortive mission of Douglas Forsyth to Kashgar, and might have been a consequence of his inability to secure effective aid from the Government of India. But it is clear that, in spite of the treaty with Russia, Yakoob Beg had no faith in his western neighbour and was still prepared to look up to its rival, the British, for support. A small weak state placed between two "iron pots" was struggling to maintain its independence.

Sir Douglas Forsyth's second mission to Kashgar was the culmination of a policy which had been pursued by the Government of India in Central Asia. The two objects of this policy, as discussed earlier, were, firstly, to secure commercial privileges for the British and, secondly, to ensure British political influence over the border states in Central Asia by obtaining a definition of their boundaries from Russia. In the case of Yarkand, the Government of India had approached Her Majesty's Government in 1873 to utilise the "good understanding" that existed between the two governments in England and Russia "to arrive at a definition of the northern and western boundaries of Yarkand." This was expected greatly to contribute to "peace and tranquillity" in Central Asia.¹ The British Foreign Office, however, did not consider the moment appropriate for raising this question with Russia, though there was no intention of modifying the policy so far pursued. Thus, though the Government of India did not

1 Secret Despatch to Secretary of State, 30 June 1873.



immediately succeed in the desire to have an understanding with Russia about the boundaries of Yarkand, as in the case of Afghanistan, and thereby seek definite recognition of their special position in the land of Yakoob Beg, they were successful in their other object of entering into definite trade and diplomatic relations with Yarkand.

Sir Douglas Forsyth after an arduous journey, made pleasant by the reception provided by the Yarkand authorities, arrived in Kashgar on 4th December, 1873. From the moment that he entered the kingdom of Yakoob Beg, the envoy of the Government of India did not fail to discern signs of the friendly feelings of the ruler towards the British. This was fortified by the official reception given to him on 11th December, when the presents sent by the Government of India were displayed before the Amir of Kashgar. These included "gems of all kinds, including two small cannon." An autograph letter of the Queen of England enclosed in a precious casket was also given to him as a token of friendship. The Amir was not slow to express his genuine desire to be friendly to India, and, as Terentyef mentions, loudly exclaimed, "Your Queen is a great sovereign. Her government is a power and a beneficent one. Her friendship is to be desired, as it always proves a source of advantage to those who possess it. The Queen is as the sun in whose genial rays such poor people as I flourish. I particularly desire the friendship of the English. It is essential to me."¹ Forsyth stayed four months in Kashgar and during this period successfully negotiated a treaty of commerce and friendship with Atalik Ghazi. The treaty was signed on 2nd February, 1874 and ratified by the Governor-General of India on 13th April, 1874.

The treaty is a landmark in Indo-British relations with the rulers of Central Asia. It confirmed the "good understanding" subsisting between the two parties and was intended "to promote commercial intercourse between their respective subjects." It provided for free entry of their subjects into the territories of each other for purposes of trade etc. and the limitation of the customs duty to 2½ per cent in the dominions of Kashgar. Article VI stipulated for the appointment of the respective representatives at the seat of their governments and commercial agents elsewhere in the country.²

The treaty with India in 1874 was, in a way, to supersede the Kaulbar treaty of commerce with Russia in 1872; and it appears Russia acquiesced in this position. Apparently no

1 Terentyef, I. Ch. VIII.

2 Boulger, Appendix for the text of the Treaty.

opposition seems to have been offered by the Czar's government, and it may be surmised, as Terentyef apprehended, that the neutrality of Yarkand was virtually admitted by the northern empire. It would be, however, unnatural to suppose that the expansionist Russian empire relinquished all interest in a kingdom which by its geographical situation was of such vital interest to the Czar's possessions in Central Asia. It is difficult to be dogmatic about the extent of opposition which Russia was able to exert against YakooB Beg, or even to assess the part which Russian diplomacy played in stimulating Chinese hostility to the ruler of Yarkand. Nonetheless, it may be stated that the Russian empire did not cease to be interested in Yarkand, and did not abate her hostility to YakooB Beg, though for the time being no overt acts of antagonism were in evidence. Chinese opposition soon overwhelmed the state of Yarkand, and Russia did nothing to stem the flood from the east, if she did not actually countenance it.

Meanwhile, the relations between Yarkand and India became intimate. In January 1875, Syed Yakub Khan came to India again and had interviews with the Viceroy and the Foreign Secretary in Calcutta.¹ The two important questions discussed were the appointment of a British envoy in Kashgar under the treaty of 1874, and the possible mode of conciliating China whose hostility to YakooB Beg had then become a reality. No decision was immediately taken on the subject of exchange of envoys. Syed Yakub Khan paid another visit to India, therefore, in the autumn of 1876, with a letter from his Amir to the Viceroy, and desired that "the conditions of the Yarkand Treaty of 1874 regarding the exchange of representatives" should be implemented.² The Government of India appear to have earmarked Mr. R.B. Shaw for the task, but were inclined to the view that he should be "deputed as a commercial agent" rather than as a political envoy, but left the matter to be decided by the Secretary of State,³ who replied in April 1877, regretting that any treaty relations should have been entered into with Kashgar, particularly as the "commercial interests at stake were insignificant and the political connection not unlikely to prove embarrassing." But he was prone to take a realistic view of the situation. In the background of Article VI of the treaty and the earnest wish of the Amir for its implementation, he

1 Notes of interview between the Foreign Secretary and the Yarkand envoy, Jan. 21, 1875. Secret Progs., May 1875, p. 118.

2 Note on the Present Position of Proposed Mission to Kashgar, 7 Jan. 1875, K.W. No. 3. F.D.S.P. 1878 April Nos. 183-85.

3 Despatch to Secretary of State, No. 30, 15 Oct. 1876.

realised that non-compliance would have "the semblance at least of breach of faith." He wrote, "such a refusal could hardly fail to prejudice the position of the Ameer towards both Russia and China and might give rise to reflections upon the faith of the British Government, which, however little justified, would be prejudicial to our good name and interests." He further assessed the advantages which might accrue from the course. One positive advantage would be "the presence at Kashgar of a judicious officer, who would be in a favourable position for acquiring trustworthy information as to the progress of events in the adjoining countries, and at the same time might, by his influence, be able to restrain the Ameer from ill-considered acts likely to embroil him with his neighbours, and to provoke attack which he would be powerless to resist effectually, and against which no assistance could be afforded to him." On striking the balance, the Secretary of State was prepared to agree to the despatch of Mr. Shaw to Kashgar and the retention of Syed Yakub Khan as envoy in India, with the proviso, however, that the British envoy's departure be "deferred till towards the close of the ensuing travelling season; by that time the position of affairs may be such as to render the measure less open to misconstruction in various quarters than it might be were its execution possible at the present moment, or, on the other hand, circumstances may have occurred to make its abandonment clearly advisable." The Secretary of State also desired that the question of permanence of the mission should also be left "an open question, without, however, at all indicating a preconceived intention that it shall be only temporary."¹

Meanwhile efforts were not wanting to stem the overwhelming danger from the Chinese empire. The British representative in Peking "strongly advised the Grand Secretary (of China) to abandon the project of recovering Zungaria and Kashgaria," but it "was strongly opposed as unpatriotic" by the Chinese Government. Later in 1876, when Sir Douglas Forsyth visited Peking he raised the question further. The Chinese empire was not prepared to recede except on the condition of submission of the Amir of Yarkand to China, his paying tribute and performing "K'o'tow." He was to remain only as a vassal and not as an independent ruler. This was acceptable neither to the Amir nor to the Government of India. The Chinese Government was not prepared to treat Yakoob Beg except as a rebel whose "rebellion must be put down." Any negotiations with him, therefore, could be conducted by

¹ Note, 7 Jan. 1875, K.W. No. 3. Op. cit.

the Tso Tsuang-Tang.¹ Nothing could come out of the efforts of Forsyth. Later in April 1877, the British Charge d' Affaires at Peking wrote that as the war against Yarkand was not proceeding well, the Chinese Council was divided in its attitude towards peace with the ruler of Yarkand. In May the Peking Embassy also informed the British Foreign Office that the Chinese Government would be prepared to treat with the Amir only on the condition that "China should exercise a legitimate influence in Kashgar." At the time the Yarkand envoy, Syed Yakub Khan, was in London, and his presence was utilised by the British Foreign Office to arrange "the alliance with Yarkand which the Chinese Government apparently contemplated." Syed Yakub Khan was also keen to seek British mediation for the "cessation of the existing hostilities between Kashgar and China." It was intended to have an informal meeting between the Chinese and Yarkand envoys in London. But the Chinese envoy was not prepared to take the initiative and did not dare write to his government unless the Yarkand envoy should agree to some such conditions as the following :—

- "(1) The Ameer to sign a Treaty with China engaging to make no more war on condition of being constituted, under China, ruler of Kashgar.
- "(2) The Ameer to cede certain towns.
- "(3) The Ameer to assist China in reconquering the country overrun by the Tungans."

Forsyth was of the view that these conditions would be acceptable to the Amir ; and on that basis a letter was addressed by Lord Derby, the Foreign Secretary, to the Chinese envoy, in which it was stated that Her Majesty's Government desired to use "their good offices to endeavour to bring about an honourable and lasting settlement of the differences between China and Kashgar. They had reason to believe that the Ameer would 'readily concur' in the following proposals :—

- "(1) A recognition by Ameer Yakub Khan of the suzerainty of China (somewhat to the same extent as it is recognised by the King of Burma). The Ameer would be left in complete control over the country he now holds, but would periodically send embassies, bearing presents or tribute, to Peking, and would address His Imperial Majesty, the Emperor of China, as his superior.
- "(2) A definitive demarcation of boundaries between the kingdom of Kashgar and China.

¹ The Chinese General who commanded the force for the reoccupation of Eastern Turkistan.

“(3) An agreement may be entered into as to the assistance to be rendered by either power to the other in case of internal trouble from Tungani or other turbulent tribes or from external enemies.”

These terms were commended to the Chinese envoy for acceptance by his government, for the implementation of which the Amir of Kashgar would send an envoy to Peking.¹

The Chinese envoy did not seem inclined to recommend these terms unless they were accompanied by the surrender of four important cities in the east. The interview between the two envoys could not materialise and the matter ended there. However, it is indicative of the policy of the British and Indian governments, that they were keen to maintain the integrity of Yarkand-Kashgar as a bulwark against Russia, though it might involve some compromise with China as to her nominal suzerainty over the Amir. But events in Kashgar itself were rapidly developing to upset their apple-cart. In the summer of 1877, Yakoob Beg died, either of illness or poisoning. The news was received late in India and that, too, was not definite. The Chinese were fast advancing to reconquer the country and their success was assured by the internal disorders which followed on the death of the Amir. “Hakim Khan Turra declared himself independent, seized the whole eastern part as far as Aksu and succeeded in gaining the support of Niaz Akim Beg, the Beg of Khotan.” Against these two, Beg Kuli Beg, the second son of Yakoob Beg, who had murdered his elder brother, Hak Kuli Beg, moved a force and defeated them. Hakim Khan fled to Russia. But meanwhile the Chinese had taken the eastern portion of the country and were advancing against Kashgar. Beg Kuli Beg sought for peace which was not forthcoming. He was at the time fighting against Khotan, the Beg of which had entered into a secret understanding with the Chinese. Beg Kuli Beg did not succeed against Khotan, hence he retired to Kashgar, which was then the objective of the Chinese. Despairing of success against them, he fled to the Russian possessions in Central Asia. The Chinese occupied Kashgar in December, 1877, and appointed Mirza Ahmed as their representative there. Thus ended Yakoob Beg's kingdom of Yarkand-Kashgar with which the Government of India had sought to establish friendly relations, and the Chinese rule was again established in Eastern Turkistan.

Before, however, the final collapse of the Muslim power in Kashgar, Beg Kuli Beg had asked for the despatch of a

¹ Note on Negotiations for the cessation of war between China and Kashgar, 6 Jan. 1878, K.W. No. 1A, F.D.S.P. 1878, April, Nos. 183-5.

permanent British mission to his kingdom. But owing to the uncertainty of the situation the Secretary of State had desired the postponement of its despatch and had also suggested that a fresh initiative in this behalf should be made by the new ruler. In December 1877, before his discomfiture the new Amir had sent a letter to the Viceroy informing him of his accession to the throne and intimating him of the growing danger of the Chinese successes and of his desire to negotiate with China on the basis of the London proposals, and seeking British friendship and soliciting their advice. This letter was accompanied by a communication from Mr. Ellis, Special Commissioner in Ladakh, in which he pointed out that while the Amir was prepared to conclude peace with China on any terms short of absorption of his country, he "seemed to be hard up for a trustworthy envoy to negotiate between himself and the Chinese general; and that the affairs both of the Ameer, and of his country, were to all appearance just now at that point when the slightest move on our part might suffice to patch up his difficulties with China, consolidate his authority at home, and secure his lasting friendship, whereas even a short delay on our part might place it entirely out of our power to exercise hereafter any control over the complications which, in that case, might probably ensue." Mr. Ellis had also suggested that he might proceed to Kashgar pending Mr. Shaw's departure and render advice to the Amir. Lord Lytton was eager to avail himself of this chance, for he believed that if the policy, already determined upon, of exercising "British influence in that country for the purpose of preventing its premature absorption either by Russia or China" was to be pursued, then positive steps should be taken to assist the Amir when he really needed it. The presence of an English officer at his court, even if he did not have the authority to promise intervention or diplomatic guarantees, might "prevent the Ameer from precipitately throwing himself into the arms of Russia," and might enable peace being made with China. And if that were done the Amir would "have substantial and lasting cause to be grateful for it," which would be an important element in establishing British influence over that kingdom. The Government of India decided to send Ellis but with stringent instructions tying his hands.¹ The event was, however, not to happen for long before these discussions were over, Beg Kuli Beg had succumbed to the Chinese and left the kingdom.

The Government of India had been keen to establish

¹ Lytton's Minute on Relations with Kashgar, 5 Feb. 1878; Despatch from Secretary of State, No. 206.

friendly influence over Kashgar and thereby save it from becoming subject to Russia in the initial stages and China later. But the inability to renounce all allegiance to the policy of "masterly inactivity" and the dilatoriness in taking effective steps to help that state, when actually in need, and the delay in establishing the embassy in the country, all contributed to the final collapse of the kingdom of Yarkand-Kashgar and the cessation of all relations with it.

CHAPTER VII

DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATIONS

STRATEGY and commerce have been the twin motive forces which have contributed to the building of communications and thus opening the undeveloped lands. Imperialism profited by this lever to extend its hold and expand its jurisdiction over the backward peoples. The mid-nineteenth century witnessed the development of communications in Asia when Russia commenced her conquests in Central Asia and Britain had stabilised the north-western frontiers of India. The needs of defence, quick transport of troops and supplies, and the demands of fast expanding commerce were the normal factors impelling rapid projection of roads, railways and steam navigation of inland water routes. More powerful than these motives, however, was the growing rivalry between the two empires, British and Russian, whose fast converging frontiers in Central Asia made them view with jealousy and fear the expansion of each other. This antagonism prompted both these, for strategic reasons primarily, though commerce was also an important factor, to develop roads and build railways to their frontiers or seek quick connections with the centre of their empires in Europe. In the next half of the century, thus, we meet with a rapid development of diverse means of communications in Western and Central Asia and schemes for the opening of trunk lines connecting Europe with the east.

The beginnings of Russian conquest from the direction of Orenburg in the west and Semipalatinsk in the east, in the mid-nineteenth century, ostensibly in pursuit of the Kirghizian hordes and for establishing a natural frontier, had led to the annexation of the rich lands of Central Asia. Tashkand and Samarkand had become their important acquisitions and Khokand and Bokhara were parts of their empire. Khiva was also not long after brought under subjection. The capital of these vast possessions, projecting from Siberia towards the Hindu-kush, was Tashkand which was separated by hundreds of miles of desert and mountain from the frontiers of Russia and her forward bases at Orenburg and on the Caspian or Black Sea. The problem of connecting Tashkand with St. Petersburg and of throwing men and supplies for maintaining the empire and conquering new lands or meeting the threatened opposition of

Great Britain led to a search for routes and their improvement. "The circumstances attending the Russification of Central Asia were so different from those affecting the settlement of Siberia as to require the employment of entirely different means." While in Siberia there was no opposition, "in Central Asia the people were a sturdy and aggressive race, fearless, brave and formidable opponents in war; and in the immediate vicinity were several rulers owning the men and means necessary to the preservation of their independence."¹ The stubborn opposition put forth by the Kirghiz or Turkomans and the fight offered by the khans of Khokand, Bokhara and Khiva necessitated effective means of transport to hurl the requisite force to defeat resistance. Moreover, constant obsession with British hostility made it inevitable that the southern frontiers must be fully protected. All these factors made the military or strategic consideration more prominent in the development of roads and the construction of railways, not only from Europe to Central Asia but also from the centre at Tashkand to the outlying posts on the frontier and to the chief centres of Central Asian life and politics. In these schemes commerce also had played its due part, but generally, in the early stages, it remained subordinate to the political and strategic motives.

When after the Crimean War Russia directed her attention to Central Asia, the only routes available were tracks used by caravans which traversed the distance to China, or rivers which flowed through the deserts and steppes. From Orenburg a trade route passed through Omsk and Turgai (Fort Orenburg) across the Kara Kum and the Kirghiz steppes to Vernoe and thence up the Ili Valley to Kulja across the Chinese frontier. Another route branched off from Orsk to Tashkand passing through Karabutak, Irgiz (Fort Uralsk), Aralsk, Kazalinsk (Fort No. 1) and thence along the valley of Syr Daria (Jaxartes) to Perovski, Julak, Turkistan, Chamkand and Tashkand. This route generally avoided the deserts which flanked it on either side as well as the Kara Tau mountains, to the south of which it detoured. Another track which joined Tashkand to the main highway in Siberia lay from Semipalatinsk through Sergiopol, south of Lake Balkash to Kopal, Iltsk Vernoe, Kastala, Tokmak, Chamkand and Tashkand. This route skirted the Ala Tau and Alexandrovski mountains which it crossed through a gap where that range met the Kara Tau range. The distance and the hardships incidental to mountain crossings made this route not always practicable for military purposes. These routes joined Tashkand to Orenburg which was connected

¹ Krausse; *Russia in Asia*, p. 198.

with Samara, the Russian railhead on the Urals. The railway was soon built up to Orenburg, which in the nineteenth century remained the terminus of the Russian railway system.

The other point of approach was from the Caspian seaboard which prior to the construction of the Trans-Caucasian Railway in the early seventies of the nineteenth century, was connected with Russia by the waterway of the Volga. The difficulties of communication to the Caspian Sea in Russia were far surpassed by the hardships incidental to travel beyond the Caspian into Turkistan. Though a number of tracks led from the Caspian coast to the Aral Sea or connected it with Khiva and the banks of the Amu Daria (Oxus), these traversed, in the north, the barren plateau of Ust-Urt or, in the south, the Desert of Kara Kum, which were the travellers' dread. The distance to Tashkand took two years to cover. Moreover, neither of the two great rivers of Turkistan, the Syr Daria or Amu Daria, fell into the Caspian Sea, but poured their waters into the Aral Sea. Therefore, even a connected water route bringing the Volga into contact with the heart of Central Asia was not possible. The fact that the two rivers fell into the Aral Sea accounts for the beginnings of Russian conquest of Turkistan on that sea-coast, at the mouth of the Syr Daria, which was connected by land with Orenburg. But the importance of the Caspian Sea with its ports of Astrakhan and Derbend, on the Russian side, could not be ignored, and very early projects of connecting the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea with the Aral Sea were mooted, for the dangers of Kara Kum Desert and the hostile attacks of the Tekke Turkomans were too fresh to admit of penetration eastwards from the south-eastern points of the Caspian Sea. In 1869 mention is made of three such road projects which were to be constructed early. The first was to connect the Krasnovodsk Bay in the Caspian by way of the old bed of the Oxus with the Aral Sea. The second was a greater favourite in so far as the distance to be covered between the two seas was only 200 miles and the terrain was supposed to involve no insuperable difficulties. This road was to connect Mertoï Bay in the Caspian Sea with Tcherychaff Bay in the Aral Sea cutting the Ust Urt Plateau on its northern side. The construction of a railway line on this route was also under consideration, and we learn from the British sources that this "Railway is to be finished in two years to connect Nijni Novogorod with Khodgend."¹ The third road was to lie between the mouth of the Emba river (Emba Bay) and Kazalia or Fort No. 1 on the

¹ *Memorandum on the Position of Russia in Central Asia*, 1869; Rawlinson's *Memorandum*, 1868.

Syr Daria, after circling round the Aral Sea. These roads were intended by General Romanofski "to put the Caucasus in direct communication with Turkistan."¹ In referring to these projects Rawlinson wrote, "At present it requires nearly two years to move troops and stores from the Volga, across the Kirghiz steppes to the advanced posts beyond the Bokhara frontier, whereas with steamers on the Caspian and the Aral, a railroad connecting the two seas, and boats of light draught navigating the Oxus and Jaxartes, a few weeks would suffice for the transport of a force from the overcrowded camps of the Caucasus into the heart of Asia, the one river being practicable for steamers as high as Khojend, and the other to the neighbourhood of Balkh."² These roads were all intended to annihilate distance between the two inland seas and thus make the fullest use possible of the waterways of the Oxus and the Syr Daria or the road which lay through its valley.

The Caspian Sea abutted on a Russian region which was rich in resources and provided access by way of the Volga or later by the Trans-Caucasian Railway which was constructed in the early seventies and which connected the Caspian shores with those of the Black Sea. The oil products of Baku and the traffic over the Volga provided a considerable fleet of water-transports which might be utilised on the Caspian Sea for the movement across of even large armies. Its accessibility through the Volga and its bordering on Caucasia, which in the early seventies contained the armed might of Russia and, owing to its railway, made early concentration of men and equipment practicable, made the Caspian Sea coast an important base of operations. The desire to possess Khiva and Merv and to be able to hold the line of the Oxus on the Afghan frontier, the prospect of concentrating on Herat and dominating the Perso-Turk boundary, the exigencies of defence against the Turkomans and the hope of acquiring the trade of India,—all these factors contributed to the importance of the south-east coast of the Caspian Sea as the *point d'appui* of projects of communication in Central Asia.

Many roads led from the shores of the Caspian Sea to Herat which, as Boulger wrote, "is one of the hearts of Asiatic life," from where roads, "if followed up to their termination, will take one not only to Moscow or Calcutta, but to Peking and the shores of the China Sea."³ The first of the roads from the Caspian Sea led from Krasnovodsk to "Kizil Arvat and thence

1 *Memorandum on Central Asia*, 1869

2 Rawlinson's *Memorandum*.

3 Boulger, p. 133.

along the slopes of the Attock to Ashkabad, Abiverd and Sarakhs" on the Persian border from where both Merv and Herat were easily accessible. This route came into prominence after 1873, when the Russian attention was drawn to the hostility of the Turkoman tribes which blocked the way to Merv and made easy communication with Khiva impossible. General Lomakin had used this road in his operations against the Tekke Turkomans, and General Annenkoff put forward a "plan in 1880 for constructing a railway from the Caspian coast to the edge of the Akkal Tekke oasis."¹ The first stretch of this line up to Kizil Arvat was completed in 1881 and further surveys were made by Lesseps in subsequent years. The other roads lay through Persian territory and had their origin at Astrabad. Three alternative roads lay between Astrabad and Meshed covering Bujnoord and Kushan by the northern, Bostan, Abbasabad, Sabzawar and Nishapur by the central, and Shahrud, Turshuz and Zaweh by the southern side. From Meshed roads lay both to Sarakhs and Herat, while by the southern route a direct road lay to Herat from Turshuz by way of Ghorian. These Khorasan roads were believed to be usable for large armies and presented no trouble of water or supplies. While the Krasnovodsk-Sarakhs road lay through undisputed Russian territory, the other roads traversed Persian territory and were not accessible to Russia unless Persia was diplomatically aligned with that Power.

Apart from the roads connecting Central Asia with Russia which were being developed in the seventies and early eighties of the nineteenth century, the Russians were reported in 1869 "to be very busy also making roads and improving communications between all the points they hold, especially Samarcand and Tashkand through Jizakhs across the Steppe, or rather desert, to Chimaz on the Jaxartes; and they have established postal communications of only 7 days between Orenburg and, Tashkand."² Boulger has mentioned many routes from the heart of Central Asia, which were believed by him to be practicable for advance against India. One of these lay from Tashkand to Ush and through Terak Pass to Kashgar from where approach to the Indian frontier was possible. The other was across the Pamir through Roshan and Shignan to the Baroghil Pass. But both these routes were considered to be long and difficult, particularly in their undeveloped state at the time. He lay, however, greater emphasis on the routes from Samarkand or Bokhara to the Afghan frontier, to Faiza-

1 Marvin, *The Russian Advance towards India*, p. 166

2 *Memorandum on Central Asia*, 1869

bad in the east or Balkh, Maimna and Herat in the west, as particularly dangerous for the security of India.¹ The road from Tashkand to Khojend, Arataba, Jizak, Samarkand and Bokhara was considerably improved and became the main highway connecting these three centres of Central Asian life. From Samarkand an important road lay by way of Shahr Sabz, Shirabad and Hissar to Kolah and Roshan on the upper reaches of the Oxus. This road brought the operational bases of Russia to Hissar and Kolah and menaced the defences of India on the Chitral side, and exposed the Afghan province of Badakshan with its main town Faizabad.

More important, however, were the roads which converged on the trans-Hindukush towns of Balkh, Andkui and Maimna from Samarkand and Bokhara. As Hissar was a base for the eastern portions of Afghanistan, Karshi was the centre of communications for the central parts, and a far better base of operations. It was connected direct with both Samarkand and Bokhara, on the one side, and with Kerki, Khoja Salah and Kilif on the Oxus, towards the south. From Kerki there was a good road to Andkui and Maimna, and both Khoja Salah and Kilif had roads for Balkh, which was connected by a good road with Khulm and Kunduz. Boulger has stated that Kilif to Balkh was the shortest road with abundance of water. Kerki was then important as "the highest point to which the Aral flotilla has been able to ascend." A better and "most used" ferry on the Oxus was that of Khoja Salah which was accessible for Russian war-vessels.² Boulger has also referred to the possibility of developing a road from Shirabad on the Samarkand-Hissar road to Kilif or Termez on the Oxus, whose "chief recommendation is that it completely avoids the desert, and that water, fuel and herbage—the three vital necessities for an army—are procurable in abundance along it."³ The importance of these roads converging on Balkh was that thereby easy approach was available to the passes on the Hindukush leading to Kabul. A road also ran through Afghan Turkistan, to the north of the Hindukush, from Kunduz to Herat, to the many points of which these roads from Russian Central Asia were directed.

Mention may also be made here of the road from Bokhara to Charjui on the Oxus and from there to Merv, from where a road well frequented lay through the Murghab valley to Herat. Khiva was also connected with Merv but the route lay

1 Boulger, pp. 121-134

2 Ibid., p. 128

3 Ibid., p. 129

through the desert and could not be used for the transport of large armies. A road from Sarakhs to Merv as also routes diverging from the Akkal territory to Merv were there, which brought Merv into contact with the Caspian seaports, but owing to the inhospitability of the Turkomans and their desert, that most important town was not easily accessible from the Caspian Sea.

Road development could only partially solve the problem of distance, but the needs of bulk transport rapidly to enable the armed forces to be concentrated at strategic points were unlikely to be met without an effective use of the railway and the steam engine. Projects of railway communication, therefore, were utilised as instruments of conquest. The two decades after the annexation of Central Asia into the Russian empire, saw many plans of railway development which were conceived for military reasons and would also be useful for the commercial exploitation of Asia.

Railway development was late in its origin in Russia itself and for long no line connected the Caspian sea-coast with the interior. In 1860 there was no railway beyond Samara eastwards. Caucasia and Siberia, both had no railway communications. The conquest of Caucasia and the military requirements of holding in subjection a recalcitrant people, along with the need of connecting the oil wells of Baku with the outside world, necessitated the construction of the Trans-Caucasian Railway from Batum on the Black Sea through Pati, Kutais and Tiflis to Baku on the Caspian Sea. There was, nevertheless, no connection between this line and the Russian railway system on the other side of the Caucasus, and Rostov on the Sea of Azov had no direct connection with Tiflis. It was not till the end of the nineteenth century that any line was built across these mountains or along the western coast of the Caspian Sea through Derbend to Baku. But the construction of the Trans-Caucasian Railway, and the difficulties involved in the subjugation of the Akkal Tekkes and other Turkoman tribes inspired General Annenkoff to conceive the plan of a trans-Caspian railway which in course of time might open up Merv and extend to Charjui, Bokhara and Samarkand. The beginnings of this railway have been graphically described by Krausse in the words, "The main difficulty throughout the many Russian expeditions in Central Asia had been the question of transport, and when General Skobelev went to Akkal in 1880 to redeem the disaster which had attended the Lomakin expedition of the previous year, he pointed out to General Annenkoff, the director of military transport, that the only

efficient means of conveying an army from the Caspian would be by means of an improvised railway. Annenkoff proved himself an able organiser; without loss of time he took the matter in hand, but found himself handicapped by the difficulty of obtaining the necessary rails. An application to St. Petersburg produced no result, but he fortunately remembered that there had been some hundreds of tons of rails lying at Ungeni, where they had been stored for the purpose of the Russo-Turkish War. Annenkoff determined to convert the rails to his present needs. The stocks were accordingly transported to the Caspian and in a very short time landed in the neighbourhood of Michael's Bay, whence twenty-six versts were laid in the direction of Molla Kari. This fragmentary railway, which was temporarily extended by a narrow-gauge trolley line, proved of considerable service during the final subjection of the Turcomans, and as soon as the fall of Geok Tepe had been brought about and the oasis of Akkal annexed by proclamation, it was decided to continue the railway as far as Kizil Arvat. The necessary plant was brought from Russia via Astrakhan and Michaelovsk. The work proceeded apace; workmen were engaged at Baku and at Astrakhan. In 1881 a hundred and sixty miles of line were laid, and in three years the whole of the distance from the Caspian to Samarcand, nine hundred miles in all, was completed, the Samarcand terminus being opened in 1888. The undertaking was in every respect a notable one both from the political and the engineering points of view. The motives which prompted the undertaking were entirely military, and the ground traversed extremely difficult, consisting over a considerable proportion of the whole distance of barren steppe and sandy desert."¹ Contemporary travellers have not failed to note the arduousness of the undertaking. Curzon has given a graphic description of the line and the terrain through which it passed.²

This line was later extended to Tashkand, Khokand and Andijan, which were connected by rail with the Caspian Sea, at the end of the nineteenth century. This Central Asian Railway was believed, "throughout its entire length, to threaten the Afghan frontier by connecting the various military posts and enabling a large force to be poured at any moment across the frontier into Herat by way of Kushk, or via the Oxus by Kerki to Balkh, and while the military strength maintained in Central Asia is sufficient to enable a considerable army to be mobilised at a few hours' notice, the direct access afforded

1 Krausse, p. 198-9

2 Curzon, *Russia in Central Asia*, Ch. III.

by the railway to the Caspian, whence limitless additions can be brought from Europe, allows of the concentration of any army which might be requisitioned for the end in view."¹ The beginnings of this railway had aroused considerable alarm in British circles and vague fears of its "rushing on at a rapid rate to the 'Key of India'" were entertained.² The alarm was not quite unfounded for in later years a branch line was pushed from Merv to Kushk, a post only five miles from the Afghan frontier and facing Herat. There was also a proposal put forth by General Annenkoff, which was then being seriously discussed in St. Petersburg, to construct a railroad to India which would make the journey possible from "London to India in nine days." Marvin has reported his interview with the General in which he said, "A railroad to India would promote friendship. If Russia completed the present Trans-Caspian line to Herat, and England prolonged the Bolan Pass railway to the same point, your troops could then proceed to India from London to Sukkur, on the Indus, via Calais, Berlin, Warsaw, and the Russian system to the Caspian; thence via Michaelovsk, Askabad, Sarakhs, Herat, and Candahar, in the space of nine days. The whole distance would be accomplished overland, except the portion of sea from Calais to Dover, and the twelve hours' run across the Caspian."³ Such a line took for granted Russo-British co-operation which was unlikely in the existing tension between the two expanding imperialisms. But the possibility of Russia herself taking up the extension of the railway system to Herat and beyond to the Indian frontier might not be altogether ruled out. An alternative proposal was to extend the line from Merv to Kushk, Herat and Kandahar to Kalat and to Sommiani on the Arabian coast. Krausse, writing about it, stated, "Such a railway once constructed would do much to satisfy the most ardent desires of Russian politicians. It would provide direct access to the Arabian Sea, would facilitate aggression in south-east Persia, and, above all, would outflank the British position on the Indian frontier."⁴ In addition to these, there was also an earlier scheme planned by Lesseps for extending the Russian railway system beyond Orenburg to Peshawar by way of Tashkand, Samarkand, Balkh and thence by the Bamian Pass to Kabul and Peshawar.⁵ These

1 Krausse, p. 201

2 Marvin, p. 167

3 Marvin, p. 171

4 Krausse, pp. 205-6

5 Foreign Department Secret Progs. Dec., 1873, Nos. 2/55. Lesseps had written about it to Ignatieff on 1 May, 1873. This proposal had long continued to be entertained in Russian circles.

unrealisable projects were the Russian version of the schemes of overland routes from India to England.

In Russian territory itself, at the same time, two projects, far advanced in their planning, of connecting Tashkand wholly overland with Russia, were put forward. One was to have a railway from Orenburg to Tashkand along the Syr Daria valley. The other was to connect Tashkand with Semipalatinsk and thence with Omsk on the Great Siberian Railway, which was commenced only in the last decade of the nineteenth century. These railways were essential for consolidating the conquests made and for exploiting the commerce of Asia. The nineteenth century did not see their fruition, but the projects were there and were greatly instrumental in not only creating a feeling of danger and alarm in Afghanistan but also constant irritation and jealousy in the British empire.

It may be necessary here to mention also the development of water-transport along the two rivers, Oxus and Syr Daria. Steam flotillas were operating there and for many years a plan was seriously considered to divert the stream of the Oxus through its old bed to the Caspian Sea, and thereby secure a direct water communication with the Volga. That it did not succeed then is another matter, but the idea was seriously entertained of having a water-route before the railway was constructed, which made such a project unnecessary.

On the other side, England had been first in the field and taken the initiative in railway construction. Before 1880 she had constructed 10,000 miles of railway in India and these were reaching rapidly the outposts on the north-western frontier. Peshawar and the Bolan Pass were then being connected with the interior of India, and during the Afghan War of Lytton, material was collected to extend the Bolan-Sibi railway to Kandahar. With the initiation of the Forward Policy in 1875, advocates of the extension of railway and telegraph into Afghanistan were not wanting, and for long the idea of a railway to Herat had appealed to many strategists. But beyond the construction of the railway to Quetta and Peshawar, in the nineteenth century, no further progress was made in that direction, primarily owing to the recalcitrant attitude of the Amirs of Kabul but also owing to the fear of facilitating thereby a Russian advance to India. This factor primarily prevented the serious entertainment of General Annenkoff's or Lessep's proposal for railways through Afghanistan, even with British initiative.

It was in another direction, however, that after 1860 for many years, British attention was directed; and the motive was

commerce as well as the reduction of time and distance in transporting troops and stores from England to India. Prior to the construction of the Suez Canal, the project of a railway connecting the Mediterranean with the Persian Gulf was seriously mooted. This project of the Euphrates Valley Railway, as it was termed, was greatly developed and publicised by W. P. Andrews, Chairman of the Delhi Railway. The intention was to connect Alexandretta on the Mediterranean with Basrah, at the head of the Persian Gulf, "between which place and Kurrachee and Bombay regular communication is now maintained by a line of steamers subsidised by the Indian Government."¹ A number of advantages were claimed for this project. It was held that thereby Karachi would become the "European port of India in place of Bombay" and that a saving of 1,000 miles would be effected in the distance between England and India. This would bring about a saving in the cost of transport of troops and stores in an emergency. It was calculated that the time taken by this route would be fourteen days and, by landing troops in Karachi, it would be quicker to concentrate them in the frontier regions. An important advantage was that by this means the invasion of India from the north-west would be impossible as "it would subject an enemy advancing towards the North-West Frontier of India to easy attack on the flank and rear." Other advantages claimed were that Portsmouth and Chatham might become "the bases of operations as easily as Kurrachee and Bombay," and that "the present dangerous isolation of Persia" could be "put an end to" as that country would then be relieved "from the undue pressure to which she is subjected by Russia; and it would afford her a short, cheap, easy and safe outlet on the Mediterranean for her trade with Europe in place of the existing long, expensive, and difficult route by the Black Sea, which is entirely at the mercy of Russia." The main motive however, in proposing this railway was to make possible a safe route to India which might not be easily interfered with by Russia. Even the Suez Canal was considered to be not free from such interference in case of a European war.

The route proposed by Andrews was to take a southerly detour which was considered to be too close to the Arabian lands and liable to attacks by the Bedouin Arabs. Colonel Herbert, Political Agent in Turkish Arabia, therefore, suggested

¹ Letter from Political Agent in Turkish Arabia to Govt. of India, 13 Aug 1870, *Pol. A. Progs.*, Oct., 1870, No. 224; for Euphrates Valley Railway and general question of Russo-British relations as affected by the opening of the Suez Canal and development of communications, see notes by Edward Paske, *F.D.S.P.* 1874, July, Nos. 162-165.

the Tigris route which would pass from Alexandretta by Aleppo, Bir, Orfa, Nisiban, Mosul, Kirkuk, Baghdad, Koot-ul-Basrah and Koorna to Basrah. This route was expected to open out a fertile valley, though slightly longer in distance, and thus afford local traffic also. He also suggested the construction of a line from Baghdad to Teheran and from Baghdad to Karbala and Nejef. It was hoped that the Ottoman Government would easily consent to a convention promising guarantee and support.

This project held the field for many years and was greatly emphasised at the time when Russia was engaged on her Trans-Caucasus Railway. But the opening of the Suez Canal and the shyness of British capital to invest in the Turkish empire gradually led to the stifling of this scheme of an overland route between India and Europe. Meanwhile Baron Reuter had come out with his scheme of Persian railways which found support at the Court of Teheran. On 13th May 1870, the Shah of Persia executed a concession to Reuter of the right to construct railways and to work mines for twenty years in Persia, on the condition that the concessionary should build an experimental line of four or five miles from Teheran to Shah Abdul Azim. This was a wide concession and opened the way for further projects. In July 1871, Mr. Dawes of Grey, Paul & Co. applied for a concession for six years to construct a line from a port on the Persian Gulf to Teheran. This was followed by a further effort by Reuter to obtain concession for a line from Rasht to the Persian Gulf, which was granted and related to the construction of railways, irrigation and other works throughout Persia. Reuter asked for British protection though not material support from Her Majesty's Government. He further placed his plan, in May 1873, before Lord Granville, for the construction of a railway through Asia Minor, "which the Turkish Government had resolved to construct from Constantinople to Diarbekir, but which they could not carry out." Reuter's scheme related to a line from Constantinople to the Persian frontier under a joint guarantee of the Turkish and British Governments.¹

All these projects "forming a system of railways between the Continent of Europe, the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean" were examined by the Government of India, and their advantages represented to the Secretary of State for India.² The attitude of the Government of India may be gauged from a note by C. U. Aitchison, then Foreign Secretary, in which he clearly

1 Foreign Dept. Secret Progs., 1873, Dec. No. 2/55

2 Despatch to Secretary of State, 2 June, 1871.

emphasised the necessity of giving "countenance and support" to Reuter's scheme of railways, for, he wrote, "if he cannot succeed in getting our support he will probably try Russia, a move which would be very injurious to us." Pointing out its advantages, he referred to the possibility of "the re-establishment of British influence in Persia," and further stated, "At the same time, provided Reuter distinctly undertook to connect Teheran with the Persian Gulf and a branch line to the Turkish frontier it might well be worth while for England and India jointly to give a guarantee for a Turkish line for a given number of years. I look upon it as a certainty that the Russians will sooner or later have a railway from the Caspian to the Persian Gulf unless they are forestalled. It is essential to the trade of South-Eastern Russia."¹ Apart from these lines contemplated by the British, the Turkish Minister Midhat Pasha was also keen to have a network of railways in the Turkish empire in Asia to connect Constantinople with Baghdad and other outlying posts.² But in 1874, owing to the intensity of hostile agitation against the railway in Persia, the Shah was compelled to cancel Reuter's concession. It was then felt that Russia had a hand in this. The Persian railway projects were hailed at the time as "supplying a link in the great chain of railway communication between England and India."³ Apart from the scheme of connecting Teheran with the Persian Gulf and connecting Persia with the projected Turkish railway system, there was a scheme for running a line along the south coast of Persia to have a direct connection between Karachi and Basra, so as to afford a continuous land route between England and India.⁴ But with the cancellation of the Reuter concession, the prospects of railway construction in Persia were indefinitely postponed.

1 Note by C.U.Aitchison, Foreign Dept. Secret Progs., 1873 Dec., Nos. 2-55 pp. 3-4.

2 F.D.S.P. 1873. Feb., Nos. 1-4.

3 F.D.S.P. March, 1874, Nos. 176/201; F.D.S.P., Oct., 1874, No. 61; Watkin to Granville, 24 May, 1871; India Office to Foreign Office, 30 June, 1871, and Rawlinson's Memorandum, 9 June, 1871, F.D.S.P., 1871; Aug., Nos. 26-28

4 Rawlinson's Memorandum, 9 June, 1871.

The question of opening Persia by means of railways continued to be discussed throughout this period as it was believed that Russia had better facilities of commerce with Persia and if no counter-communications were established by the English from the south to connect the Persian Gulf with the interior, their commerce would be greatly affected. Trade more than strategy was the guiding motive. For papers on this subject, F.D.S.P., June, 1876, Nos. 42-46. July, 1876, Nos. 75-77; Oct., 1879; Nos. 16-41. *Precis* by Clarke dated 17 Jan., 1879 in the last Proceedings is particularly important.

It will be clear from the above brief analysis of the various schemes for railway development in Asia, that both Russia and England were eager to bring India into overland communication with Europe and were prepared to open up Persia, Afghanistan, Turkish Arabia or Central Asia, both for strategic and commercial advantages. But their rivalry prevented a co-operative effort, and made it impossible for Afghanistan or Persia to have any railways. It may also be surmised that shipping interests in England gradually succeeded in putting an end to all such projects. Fear of Russia, reaction to the Forward Policy, opposition of the local rulers, and the imperialists' jealousy of a competitor, were instrumental in delaying or completely quashing railway development in Western or Central Asia. But the effect even of abortive schemes was considerable as they greatly aggravated the existing tension in Anglo-Russian relations.

CHAPTER VIII

MERVOUSNESS

(Further Expansion of the Russian Empire)

IN an earlier chapter has been described how Russia established her empire in Central Asia. The conquest of Khiva in 1873 completed the process of expansion to the northern banks of the Oxus and brought the Russian empire into close contiguity to the kingdom of Afghanistan over a long stretch of territory. The treaty with Khiva turned its Khan into "a mere puppet who was to be entirely under Russian guidance." The river Oxus was "completely under Russian control," "a large slice of Khivan territory was annexed to Russia, Khivan independence was wholly destroyed, and a considerable Russian force was permanently established in a fort on the Oxus within two marches of the Khan's capital."¹ Soon after and as a consequence of the new arrangements in Khiva, the treaty with Bokhara was revised, and not long after Khokand was integrated into the Russian empire. The developments up to the year 1875 had made the Russian Czar master of the central regions, yet in the east in Zungaria and Kashgar and the west in Turkomania between the Oxus and the Caspian Sea, independence lingered in its last strongholds. While in the east the Russian designs were frustrated by the recalcitrance of Yakoob Beg, the anticipatory moves of the Government of India and the reappearance of China in all her might, in the west the nomadic Turkoman tribes, in their weakness, provoked the Imperialist greed and became victims of Russian expansion. This territorial lacunae between the Russian frontiers and the borders of Afghanistan and Persia not only militated against the principle of continuity of possessions and obstructed easy access from Russia in Europe to the Viceregal capitals in Central Asia, but also afforded access to the rival British empire to drive a wedge and thus sit with a loaded pistol pointed at the head of the Russian empire. Moreover, the possession of this region was desirable both for diplomatic control over Persia and Afghanistan and for the eventual realisation of the Russian ambition of marching against India to threaten the flanks of the British empire.

That the conquest of Khiva had brought danger nearer to Merv was fully realised by the Government of India. The Amir

¹ *Russia's March Towards India*, by an Indian Officer, Vol. I, p. 334.

of Afghanistan was also not without fears, for he had rightly appreciated the consequences of Russian action in Turkomania on his own security. Naturally he felt and expressed "some uneasiness at the rapid advance of Russian power towards his frontier." His apprehensions were more particularly "roused by the reported intention to send a Russian expedition to capture Merv and reduce the Turkoman tribes of those parts." It was apprehended that such a course would result in driving "the Turkomans to take refuge in the province of Badghees in Herat." "This," as Granville wrote to Loftus, "the Ameer fears, will lay him open to a demand from the Russian authorities, that he shall either prevent the Turkomans from committing aggressions, or permit the Russian forces to enter the territories of Afghanistan for the purpose of punishing the hostile tribes."¹ These apprehensions were not hypothetical; and the British Government sought early an exposition of the views and intentions of the Russian Government, and at the same time unequivocally expressed their own interest in the new crisis which seemed to develop at the moment. Lord Granville pointed to the rumours of an impending expedition against the Turkomans, which he did not regard "entirely out of the question," for as past experience showed, despite the discountenance and disavowal of the Government at St. Petersburg, "circumstances may occur . . . to force the Russian Government into a course to which they are on principle opposed." The difficulties of dealing with wild tribes on the frontier had resulted in annexations of territory, fresh aggressions by the tribes and further "annexations and occupations." Lord Granville concluded on the basis of the recent happenings in Central Asia, that "in the face of these events it would be unwise not to contemplate the possibility that considerations of self-defence, or the necessity of punishing acts of plunder and hostility, may eventually give occasion for a Russian expedition against the Turkoman tribes."² These were likely to affect the security of Afghanistan, hence he desired "that the question of any further expedition against the Turkoman tribes may be carefully considered, in conjunction with the results which the Amir of Cabul apprehends may ensue from it."³

He emphasised at the same time, "that the independence of Afghanistan is regarded by them (Her Majesty's Government) as a matter of great importance to the welfare and security of

1 Earl Granville to Lord Loftus, 7 Jan. 1874, Correspondence Central Asia (C 919), pp. 8-9

2 Granville to Loftus, 7 Jan. 1874

3 Ibid.

British India and to the tranquillity of Asia. Should the Turkoman tribes be driven into the neighbourhood of Herat now or hereafter, in consequence of any military operations effected by Russian power, the Ameer might labour under a double hardship ; first in the disturbance of his dominions ; secondly, if he were held responsible for controlling tribes of that wild race and restraining them from incursions upon the country from which Russia had expelled them. On the other hand, it does not appear how he could justly be held responsible in such circumstances; and, if he were so held, he would have a strong claim to consideration, on the part of all such as rightly appreciate his position; on the other hand, questions might thus be raised which it was the object of the engagement entered into between Great Britain and Russia to obviate, and which it cannot be the interest of either country to revive.”¹

This spirited protest by the British Government and their explicit enunciation of interest in the developments in the Turkoman country, and particularly in the integrity of Merv, brought the usual assurance from Prince Gortchakov that Russia “had no intention of undertaking an expedition against the Turkomans.” But he made no secret of the fact that “if these turbulent tribes were to take to attacking or plundering us, we should be compelled to punish them. This is a necessity which Her Majesty’s Government know from their own experience, and which no Government in contact with wild populations can avoid. We are in any case the first to wish that this punishment, if it becomes necessary, should be inflicted as near as possible to our own frontier.”² This assurance may have been true in the then circumstances, for Merv and the vicinity of Herat which would directly affect the security of Afghanistan were not the immediate objectives. The probing into the Turkoman country was to begin from the Caspian side, and the process of conquest was first to envelop the Akkal territory directed against the Tekkes on the Atrek river in the neighbourhood of the Caspian Sea and the Persian frontiers. The resistance of the Tekkes also postponed contact with Afghanistan borders, but the Government of India could not afford to be oblivious of the slow but steady onward march of the Russian forces nearer Herat, “the Key of India.”

The absorption of Turkoman territory into the Russian empire was not completed before 1884 and was rapid in its process only in the last three years. But with the fall of Khiva to them, the Russian had commenced gradual penetration,

1 Granville to Loftus. 7 Jan. 1874.

2 Gortchakov to Brunnov. 21 Jan. 1874. Ibid., p., 11

peaceful or otherwise, into the steppes inhabited by these warlike but predatory tribes. The first victims of Russian aggression were the Yomuds against whom Kaufmann's uncalled-for and unjustified expedition was a glaring example of the cruelty and greed of Imperialist Powers. Yet this atrocious attrition failed to subdue the spirit of freedom of the Turkoman tribes. On the contrary, it roused their feelings of hatred and revenge and set in motion a round of attacks and plundering raids on the villages peopled by tribes friendly to the Russians. Even Merv Turkomans could not remain unaffected, and before the close of 1873 they had "plundered caravans of stores intended for the garrison of Petro-Alexandrovsk."¹ Thus Kaufmann's action against the Yomuds had led to a reaction which in the end culminated in the conquest of the whole of Turkoman territory. General Krijhanoffsky rightly diagnosed the situation when he said : "It will now be necessary to send expeditions against them for many years to come; their country will be a second Caucasus, and in the end we shall be obliged to take possession of it."²

However, earlier steps in this direction were not pursued on the Khivan side, but were taken up in earnest nearer the Caspian Sea. In that region since their occupation of Krasnovodsk Bay in 1869, the Russians had built Fort Alexandrovski on the Manguishalk Peninsula, and in 1871 had occupied the mouth of the Atrek, taking the Turkoman settlement of Chikishliar which became their chief military station on the south-east coast of the Caspian Sea.³ Early in 1874, on 21st March, the Emperor approved the formation of the Trans-Caspian military district with General Lomakin as its first Governor. This district comprised "the whole of the eastern shores of the Caspian from Mertuii Kultuk Bay on the north to the river Atrek on the south, and as far eastwards as the borders of the Khanate of Khiva."⁴ The new governor was not without ambitions, and soon commenced operations to bring the Turkoman tribes into the Russian fold. On his arrival General Lomakin issued a circular to the Ak and Ata-Bai tribes exhorting them to maintain tranquillity and peace and not to molest the Russian caravans passing between Khiva and the Caspian Sea. He asked them to send their elders to him so that he might "give them good advice, and communicate to them the sincere and good wishes of the Great Emperor towards you; and after having held

1 *Russia's March Towards India*, II, p. 20

2 *Russia's March Towards India*, II, p. 20

3 Michell's Report, March 1873, F.D.S.P. 1874, April, Nos. 147-179.

4 *Russia's March Towards India*, II, p. 21.

consultations satisfactory to both parties, we may exchange papers, and by means of such a document our friendship may last for ever.”¹ The wolf calling the lamb for a conference! This circular was sent to other Turkoman tribes also which inhabited the country between the Caspian Sea and the Oxus, and resulted in the visit of some Yomud and Akkal Tekke chiefs to Ashurada who were treated with liberality and impressed by the glory and might of the Russian Emperor, and in their turn “declared their friendship for the Russian Government.”²

Lomakin's measures were not confined to this paper approach. He “made a short reconnaissance up the Atrek river from Chikishliar and constructed a small fort on the river bank.”³ Later when in October 1874 the Tekkes made a raid on the village of Dashli,⁴ he asked for the release of prisoners from Sofi Khan, the Chief of Kizil Arvat, and on 19th February 1875, received him at Krasnovodsk with due honour and entered into friendly relations with him.⁵ Meanwhile, he had been contemplating an expedition against the Tekke settlements on the Atrek, which, however, was not permitted by the Czar. Yet he decided to explore the old bed of the Oxus, and remained with his force at Igdi for ten days where he received declarations of “submission and proffers of service” from the Tekke elders. In a subsequent march southwards towards the Atrek, he accepted the submission of Jaffar Bai and Ak-Ata-Bai tribes who “promised to raise a force of 500 horsemen to keep the Tekkes in check.” He reached Chat and then returned to his base. Thus in this early stage in 1874-75, the Russian effort in the Caspian region was limited to reconnaissance and peaceful influence over the neighbouring Turkoman tribes, and did not develop into a show of force to dominate the Turkomans. Nonetheless, the intention of including the tribal territory in Russian possessions and bringing it to march with the frontiers of Afghanistan and Persia was quite evident. The velvet glove camouflaged the steel fist which was certain to be employed if occasion demanded it. Naturally, these early exhibitions of Russian imperialist ambition helped to create alarm in the Government of India, and diplomacy became active to sheathe Russian aggression and hinder it from approaching the preserves of Britain whose centre then was Herat.

The implications of Russian moves in the trans-Caspian steppes were not lost on the Government of India which saw in

1 Central Asian Correspondence No. 1. (1878) (C-2164) No. 20. p. 19

2 *Russia's March Towards India*, II, p. 22

3 *Russia's March Towards India*, II, p. 21

4 25 miles from Krasnovodsk.

5 *Russia's March Towards India*, II, p. 23

these measures of bringing the Turkoman tribes "by conquest or by corruption under the immediate influence and control of Russia" a design to absorb Merv and threaten Herat, as a preliminary to establishing Russian influence in Kabul. The Russian Government had claimed for itself freedom of action in the region not actually embraced by the kingdom of Afghanistan, and resented British protests against any action undertaken in the Turkoman territory. This had reinforced the suspicion that Russia desired to incorporate the Turkoman tribes, "a warlike body of some 80,000 armed horsemen" into her empire, so as to make them "a military adjunct to her influence in those quarters."¹ Even Russian action nearer the Caspian Sea helped to strengthen the suspicion that the intention was to exercise control over the Turkomans living on the Gurgan and Upper Atrek rivers. It was clear from the statements in the contemporary Russian press that it was desired to limit the Persian boundary to the Karassu or Astrabad stream and thus include the Gurgan river within Russian dominions. This would have brought the Goklan and other Turkoman tribes, till then subject to Persian suzerainty, under Russian sway. It would open the road to Meshed and "lead to the opening of a question to which in the course of events, Merv will be secondary, as constituting one of the *points d'appui* and points of observation to be held by Russian columns advancing from the Oxus."² Danger to Merv, the possibility of Persia being threatened into submission to Russia and the inevitable domination of important highways leading to India were the probable consequences of General Lomakin's measures against the Turkomans, and it is no wonder that even Lord Northbrook's Government was seized by "Mervousness" which grew into intensity with the arrival of Lord Lytton as Viceroy.

On September 8, 1874 the Government of India, in their despatch to the Secretary of State for India, drew attention to General Lomakin's Circular and pointed out if this document be genuine, then "the Persian territory between the Attrek and Goorgan is practically annexed to the Russian dominions, and authority is assumed in respect to the whole Turcoman country to the borders of Afghanistan." These proceedings, "in their view," cannot fail to excite uneasiness and alarm in the minds of our Persian and Afghan allies, and demand the serious attention of Her Majesty's Government."³ The British

1 Memo. on Central Asia, F.D.S.P. July, 1874, No. 101

2 Secret Progs., May, 1875, Nos. 22-26

3 Governor-General-in-Council to Salisbury, 8 Sept., 1874, Correspondence Central Asia, p. 20

Foreign Office soon took up the issue with the Government of Russia and desired the latter to "impress upon General Lomakin the expediency of abstaining from molesting the tribes who frequent the country to the south of the Attrek."¹ The Russian Government referred to the incident as *mal entendu* which "had been misrepresented" and expressed surprise at the explanation asked for by the British Government.² This seemingly slight affair led to an enunciation of the attitudes of the two Governments which, while not completely setting at rest the suspicions aroused, for the moment relieved the tension. In March 1875, Count Schouvaloff, Russian Ambassador to the Court of St. James, in his interview with Lord Derby, asked whether his presumption was correct that "there was no inclination on the part of England to advance further in the direction of the Russian possessions, unless such advance were considered by us necessary for defensive purposes, in order to protect our actual dominions." Lord Derby protested his non-aggressive intentions towards Afghanistan and stated that "the only case in which I could conceive an advance of British troops westward as probable was in the event of any Russian movement tending to the occupation of Merv." He reminded the Russian envoy "of the great importance which the Indian Government attached to Merv, and the danger to our relations that would ensue if it were meddled with." Count Schouvaloff "saw the danger that might arise if the two powers were brought face to face in the neighbourhood of Herat", and secured an assurance from Lord Derby "that England would not move if Russia did not," for his Government "only desired the maintenance of the *status quo*, and certainly should not be the first to take steps that might be considered aggressive."³ This gesture on the part of England evoked an important statement of policy by the Imperial Government of Russia. Prince Gortchakov in his communication of 5th April, 1875 to Count Schouvaloff declared most unequivocally his master's intention not to extend "the frontiers of Russia, such as they exist at present in Central Asia, either on the side of Bokhara or on the side of Krasnovodsk and of the Attrek."⁴ He emphasised "we have no inducement to do so. On the contrary, the Emperor deems any extension of our frontiers in those parts as being opposed to our own interests. We shall cause those frontiers to be respected, and shall protect our commerce, we shall punish any act of violence

1 Derby to Loftus, 6 Nov., 1874. Correspondence Central Asia, p. 20

2 Loftus to Derby, 17 Nov., 1874. Ibid., p. 21

3 Derby to Loftus, 19 March, 1875, Central Asia (I), p. 24

4 Gortchakov to Schouvaloff, 5 April, 1875, Ibid., p. 26

and pillage in such manner as to prevent their recurrence, we shall endeavour to extirpate brigandage, and to establish the security of our possessions. The configuration of these countries and the manners of their inhabitants do not admit of our stating beforehand the precise measures which may be necessary for the practical attainment of this object. It is enjoined on us by our rights, our duties, and our interests. We are bound to fulfil it, and we shall do so. Nothing, however, should be done beyond what is indispensable for this purpose.”¹ In these words the Russian Government clearly retained its liberty of action, but tried to convince the British Government that if the Government of India “were to exert its influence over the Ameer of Cabul to dissuade him from any inconsiderate act of a kind to excite or encourage the Turcomans, whatever the measures may be, which these pillaging tribes may render it necessary for us to take to restrain or to punish them, they can in no way prejudice either the *status quo* agreed on between England and us, or the good relations which we desire to maintain between the two countries.”²

This emphatic and unequivocal declaration of Russian policy however failed to clear the mist of suspicion in India or at the India Office. Lord Salisbury expressed “his fear that if the present claim be allowed to pass unchallenged, it may sooner or later, lead to complications affecting Indian interests, in regard to Merv, which may seriously embarrass Her Majesty’s Government On these and other considerations, it is not expedient, if not impossible . . . for Her Majesty’s Government to accept the position of inaction which Prince Gortchakov’s letter apparently wishes to force upon it, whatever may be the character of future operations by Russia against the Turkomans.”³ The India Office also desired to retain its independence of action. This view of Lord Salisbury found fullest expression in the Memorandum presented to the Russian Government in October, 1875.⁴ Her Majesty’s Government clearly emphasised that “each successive advance of the Russian frontier towards Afghanistan may involve complications which it is equally the interest of both England and Russia to avoid, and may raise up the most serious obstacles to the continued pursuance of the policy which has hitherto guided both Powers alike to maintain intact the integrity of Afghan territory. This is an object to which Her Majesty’s Government attach the

1 Gortchakov to Schouvaloff, 5 April, 1875.

2 Ibid.

3 Hamilton to Tenterdon, 22 June, 1875. *Central Asia* (II), p. 44

4 Derby to Doria, 25 Oct., 1875, Inclosure. Ibid., pp. 58-60

highest importance, and they must reserve to themselves the most complete liberty of action under all future contingencies as to the measures which may, in their opinion, be necessary to secure it. They cannot but feel that such an event, for instance, as the occupation of Merv, which would bring the line of Russian territory into direct contact with Afghan territory, would arouse the susceptibilities of the Ameer to the highest degree, and possibly involve him in a common course of defensive action with the Turkoman tribes upon his borders."¹ For these reasons, it was stated, the British Government deprecated extension of Russian territory towards the Afghan border, and viewed with satisfaction Russian assurance of non-aggression in the Turkoman territory.

This phase of Anglo-Russian diplomatic correspondence was capped by the Russian statement made on February 3/15, 1876 that while Afghanistan would "remain outside the sphere of Russian action, the two Cabinets should regard as terminated the discussions relative to the intermediate zone, which have been recognised as unpractical; that, while retaining entire freedom of action, they should be guided by a mutual desire to pay due regard to their respective interests and necessities, by avoiding, as far as possible, any immediate contact with each other, and any collisions between the Asiatic States placed within the circle of their influence."² This enunciation of policy did not succeed in pacifying apprehensions in the Indo-British mind of the eventual absorption of Turkoman territory within the Russian dominions. The danger soon revived by General Lomakin's advance to Kizil Arvat in the autumn of 1876 which, however, was not successful, and the commander was forced to retreat. In February, 1877, General Lomakin again issued a proclamation to the Yomud Turkomans declaring his intention of punishing the Tekke and constructing a fort at Kizil Arvat.³ He led another expedition in April which also met with disaster and Lomakin was forced to retire to Krasnovodsk.⁴ But even these frustrated attempts against Kizil Arvat were effective in creating alarm in Simla, where the temporary occupation of Kizil Arvat was viewed as the first step in an early conquest of the Attrek territory and the occupation of Merv, right up to the confines of Herat.⁵

The reaction of the Government of India to these develop-

1 Memorandum, op. cit.

2 Gortchakov to Schouvaloff, 3/15 Feb., 1876, Central Asia (II), p. 69

3 Central Asia (I), pp. 108-9

4 Derby to Loftus, 13 June, 1877, Thomson to Derby, 16 June, 1877, Thomson to Derby, 7 Aug., 1877, Central Asia (I).

5 Viceroy to Secretary of State, Telegram, 30 May, 1877

ments was the fear that Merv would shortly fall to Russia. In his telegram to the Secretary of State for India, the Viceroy, on 30th May, 1877, expressed the view "that Russia should immediately and plainly be told that any further advance of her forces now established at Kizil Arvat will constitute a *casus belli* with England." But the British Government was not prepared for it. Hence "the only other course is to help the Turkomans with whom I am now in a position to open safe communication from Quetta through Meshed. Our information leads us to believe that if secretly organised and encouraged by us, they can make a powerful resistance to any Russian force, and as they are not unwilling to be annexed to Afghanistan, influence now obtained over them may eventually furnish valuable basis of negotiations with Cabul. Seek permission for it."¹ This communication had an immediate effect in a *demarche* at St. Petersburg by the British envoy. Lord Derby desired Lord Loftus to renew representation to the Government of Russia by recalling earlier statements made by the two Governments on the subject, and "pointing out that the occupation of Merv would be held by the general opinion of the inhabitants of the neighbouring regions of Asia to announce a design on the part of His Majesty the Emperor of Russia to extend his influence, if not his dominion, into territories with which Her Majesty's Government have understood from the Government of His Imperial Majesty that it is not His Majesty's intention to interfere. Such an impression would impose upon Her Majesty's Government the necessity of making a corresponding advance in order to allay apprehension and to remove misconceptions from the minds of the people of those countries. They could not, however, look upon so close an approximation of the outposts of the two Empires as in itself desirable." Hence he desired the Government of Russia to issue orders to its officers to abstain from "advancing into the neighbourhood of Merv."² To this anticipatory protest, the Russian Government had no difficulty in replying, assuring the Government of England that the expedition to Kizil Arvat had merely the object of punishing "the Turkoman hordes who have for some time past infested the route from Krasnovodsk to Khiva and threaten our caravans." It was "nothing more than a simple military expedition, such as our troops in the Caucasus undertake every year to keep order on our frontiers." The Commandant was strictly enjoined not to exceed his instructions in this sense, and the British Govern-

1 Viceroy to Secretary of State, Telegram, 30 May, 1877, F.D.S.P., Nov., 1877, No. 106/27.

2 Derby to Loftus, 13 June, 1877, Central Asia (I), p. 111

ment was exhorted to dispel all "anxiety respecting Merv."¹

This explanation by the Russian Foreign Office had some truth about it and the circumstance of the retreat of General Lomakin from Kizil Arvat made it appear as an expression of a settled policy. But the instinct of the Government of India was correct and all signs pointed to the ultimate design of Russia to engulf Merv in the rising tide of her territorial expansion. The reports from the British envoy at Teheran and political rumours reaching from other stations in Central Asia indicated the probability of the early absorption of the Turkoman lands unless some effective action was taken by the British Government. Thomson from his vantage point in Teheran could more precisely observe the trend of Russian moves. In his despatches he predicted that "Russia's two next moves will be, first, subjugation of the Akkal line of country, and, next, the occupation of Merv;" and, in view of the magnitude of the British interests involved, considered the measures which should be taken to frustrate these moves. In his view three courses were open to his employers to rescue Merv from falling into the hands of Russia. "The first course is to occupy Candahar or Herat, or both, and to make Merv a dependency of the latter. The next is to incorporate Merv with Afghanistan, and the last and least acceptable alternative is to permit it to pass under the dominion of Persia."² From the noting in the Foreign Department of the Government of India, it is clear that Thomson favoured the second course, for owing to the uncertain attitude of Persia, he believed that "a Persian occupation of Merv would only be a degree better, even if it were not a degree worse, than a Russian one."³ The Government of India was fairly seized of this question and their mind was moving in the direction of the following courses of action :—

"(a) That British influence be re-established in Persia, by assuring the Shah that His Majesty will have adequate support from the British Government in that opposition which Persia, if supported, is best able to offer to further Russian encroachments in the direction of Merv.

"(b) That British officers be sent, as soon as possible, to Merv, with authority, after ascertaining the position of affairs there, to afford to the Turkomans

1 Giers to Schouvaloff, 18 July, 1877. Central Asia (I), p. 1-3

2 Thomson to Derby, No. 11, dated 26 July, and No. 118, dated 6 Aug., 1877.

3 Note on the contemplated occupation of the Akkal country and Merv by Russia and the policy to be pursued by England, F.D.S.P., 1877; Nov., Nos. 130-50.

all the assistance in their power, if the prospects of resistance seem favourable.

- “(c) That we should be prepared to take such political and military measures as the course of events may render necessary, to prevent Russia from obtaining a footing, or even a dominant moral influence, in Afghanistan.”¹

These conclusions were based on a thorough, logical and spirited examination of the problem by the Government of India in their despatch of 2nd July, 1877. After emphasising the importance of the Kizil Arvat step for Merv, the Government of India dilated on the strategic importance of Merv, particularly in their existing relations with Afghanistan. They wrote, “So long as we could reasonably count on maintaining a paramount influence at Cabul and Herat, the occupation of Merv might be treated as a comparatively remote, though serious, danger. But the practical result of the policy of passive expectation which has been for some time pursued by the British Government is that, during the last four years, British influence has been steadily replaced by Russian influence at Cabul, and we can now no longer reckon on the prevalence of British interests at Herat as a counterpoise to the presence of Russian regiments at Merv. On the contrary, the Power which is first able to occupy that locality must inevitably command the western frontier of Afghanistan; and if British policy fails to rescue Merv from the dominion of Russia, not only Russian policy, but the natural force of facts, will effectually exclude British influence from Herat.” Furthermore, the Government of India apprehended that “unless the course of history were suddenly reversed,” the occupation of Herat by the Russians would inevitably follow their occupation of Merv; and that “would mean the establishment of Russian sovereignty, or influence, throughout Afghanistan, and its extension to the present frontiers of British India; carrying with it the command of all the passes into North-Western India.” Another consequence which they feared was the “closing of our trade routes to Central Asia and Northern Persia” which would “grievously cripple” British commerce. But the most serious danger which was contemplated was “the extension of Russian influence over Afghanistan, till that state becomes a mere tool in the hands of Russia, powerless to resist her commands” with the result that “then our Indian frontier armaments instead of being calculated, as they now are, to resist mere mountain tribes, will have to be recast

¹ Despatch to Secretary of State, dated 2 July, 1877. F.D.S.P. 1877. Nov., No. 129.

on a scale fit to cope with organized and combined attacks supported by European skill, arms, money, and possibly even troops. India itself will then become exposed to an influence rival and hostile to our own, and with all the prestige of success upon its side. Every passing cloud of disagreement in European politics will then at once make itself felt throughout the length of our frontier, and send a thrill of hope to every discontented mind in India; and we shall then be bound, beyond escape, to accept, in a hopelessly unfavourable position, the struggle for supremacy in the East, whenever that struggle is forced upon us."¹

They summed up the position thus : "We believe that the occupation of Kizil Arvat is an important step towards the speedy conquest of Merv and the whole Tekke Turkoman country; that the occupation of Merv is a step towards which the Russians are compelled by considerations of such weight as must override any mere protests on our part, or promises on theirs, that this event is a certainty, unless prevented by action on our part; that the occupation of Merv will greatly strengthen the military position of Russia in the East for the exercise of a commanding influence inevitably, directly, and most powerfully, prejudicial to our own; and that it will be necessarily followed by complications with the Cabul Government, involving the occupation of Herat, and the extension of Russian sovereignty, or influence, over Afghanistan. Feeling as we do that these events can be foretold with almost complete certainty, and duly recognising the serious responsibility we should incur if we failed to consider and provide for them in time, as far as it lies in our power to do so, we deem it our urgent duty to solicit from Her Majesty's Government such an immediate and definite declaration of its Central Asian policy as may enable us to co-operate efficiently therewith, whenever the occasion for action (which will probably be sudden, fugitive and irrevocable) shall have arisen."²

The steps discussed were protest, which was negatived as infructuous; declaration to Russia that her boundary in Central Asia cannot be regarded as "naturally transitional" and that the next forward step would be regarded by England as a *casus belli*, a measure which might not command public support in England; support to Afghanistan in entering into friendly relations with the Tekke Turkomans and incorporating Merv into the Afghan kingdom, a step dangerous in the existing attitude of the Amir; support to Persia to extend her sovereignty over

1 Despatch to Secretary of State, 2 July, 1877, F.D.S.P. 1877, Nov., No. 129

2 Ibid

Merv, a course of doubtful utility owing to the Russian influence there; and strengthening Turkoman resistance by the despatch of British officers there and lending them support. The most desirable step to prevent the danger of Russian hold at Merv would have been to let Afghanistan extend her influence there, and by establishing British agents at Kandahar and Herat, through amicable negotiations with the Amir, to maintain British control in that region. But owing to the attitude of Sher Ali, this result was not possible, unless "by some means wholly independent of the co-operation, and wholly regardless of the resistance, of Sher Ali."¹ As a counterpoise to Russian control of Merv, then, it was deemed essential to establish "a commanding British influence at Herat, visibly represented by the presence of an agent, and supported by assurances of material assistance, should Russia attempt further advances. Towards this object the endeavours of the Government of India were directed in Kabul; but the intransigence of Sher Ali might oblige them "to choose between surrendering Afghanistan altogether to Russia, or taking more vigorous action than we have yet taken to secure our interests there."² And this action was envisaged eventually to be "the military occupation of Western Afghanistan (whether with, or without, the consent of the Ruler of that country) including the important fortress of Herat."³ But this was a desperate course; hence the immediate step, which the Government of India desired to pursue, was the visit of some British officers to the Turkoman country to see if their resistance could be bolstered up.

Her Majesty's Government did not take the same view of the danger apprehended from General Lomakin's move to Kizil Arvat, and were not certain if that place was not within the Russian frontiers. Moreover, the return of the Russian General, since the date of the Viceroy's despatch, to the Caspian Sea lent a different aspect to this matter. Yet the Secretary of State was not unmindful of the possibility of a recurrence of such occupation of Kizil Arvat and forward move to Merv, whether by conquest or by a *coup de main*. But he believed that this possibility must involve the lapse of many years, and there would be ample time then for deciding upon the "corresponding military measures which may be expedient." Meanwhile Her Majesty's Government decried "military measures of precaution against the capture of Merv" as "inopportune" and likely to be "calamitous." The Secretary of State wrote, "Any

1 Despatch 2 July, 1877, para 31.

2 Ibid., para 43.

3 Ibid., para 48.

action tending to encourage the Turkomans to take up arms or to make hostile preparations against Russia, any supply of money or arms, or the mission of officers to organize the tribes, would not only expose them to the resentment and vengeance of their powerful neighbour, from whom you would be unable to protect them, but also would be inconsistent with the proclaimed policy of Her Majesty's Government. So long as the relations of Her Majesty's Government with the Emperor of Russia are those of peace and amity, any measure which might bear the semblance of unofficial war, or might give to the Turkoman tribes the power of implicating your Government in such a proceeding, must be seriously avoided." Nevertheless "this abstinence from aggressive action is by no means incompatible with the duty of maintaining an attitude of due preparation against any dangers that may possibly arise." For this purpose the Government of India was enjoined "to obtain a friendly influence over the Ruler of Afghanistan;" and to secure the means by which speedier and fuller information of the course of events beyond the frontiers of Afghanistan might be available. With this end and for any eventual military measures, it was necessary to explore the approaches to Merv from the west. Therefore, Her Majesty's Government authorised the mission of Captain Napier, ostensibly for the purchase of horses, to the Turkoman chiefs and Merv.¹

It will be evident from the correspondence quoted above that the Russian move towards Kizil Arvat, which had eventually as its object the subjugation of the entire Turkoman country up to the borders of Afghanistan, excited alarm in the Government of India and led Lord Lytton to demand liberty for definite action, even military if need be, to counteract it. The developments in the Caspian region, when projected in the background of the growing tension between Kabul and Calcutta and the rapidly declining influence at Teheran, seemed to be exceedingly dangerous for the security of British hold over India. Merv and Herat in this context loomed into importance again. The Government of India was not prepared to let these gateways of India pass easily into Russian hands; but if the loss of Merv became inevitable, it might be necessary to maintain a grip over Herat, by the military occupation of western Afghanistan. Sher Ali's reluctance to submit to the bullying tactics of Lord Lytton strengthened the latter in his resolve to detach western Afghanistan from the sovereignty of Kabul, a motive which prompted the second Afghan War. To secure the freedom of the Tekke Turkomans, the Government of India was prepared to strengthen the Persian resistance and

¹ Despatch from Secretary of State, F.D.S.P. 1878, Oct., No. 11

even accept the fact of Persian suzerainty over Merv. Her Majesty's Government was persuaded to offer moral support to the Shah of Persia in any protest against Russian aggression on the Attrek.¹ But with the return of General Lomakin from Kizil Arvat, the Persian Government appeared to be hesitating and timid in asserting its sovereignty and protesting against Russian expansion. It was also evident that little reliance could be placed on the faithfulness of the Persian Government to the British cause, for at the moment Russian influence was fast growing at Teheran and the Shah was then contemplating a visit to St. Petersburg.² Thus, in this situation of the explicit hostility of Afghanistan and the fickleness and timidity of Persia, the only course open to the Government of India was to help in stiffening the resistance of the Tekke Turkomans, while at the same time preparing for an eventual showdown in Afghanistan. But the British Government was not prepared for any open energetic measures which might provoke the hostility of Russia. Hence, all that was effected at the moment was the mission of Captain Napier to Merv for obtaining "fuller and speedier knowledge of the course of events beyond the frontiers of Afghanistan," and to explore "the approaches to Merv from the West."³

It will be unnecessary to go into the details of the negotiations and efforts to secure Napier's entry into Merv, and his explorations there. But it is clear from the contemporary correspondence that his mission, though definitely stated to have "no other object than the acquisition of correct information," had an important political purpose. The Government of India, on 8th June, 1878, were led to state expressly "that the political object of Captain Napier visiting Merv was considered to be decidedly of superior importance to the exploration of routes."⁴ Napier made no secret of the purpose of his mission. In his letter to Lyall, Foreign Secretary, from Meshed, dated 16-18th July, 1878,⁵ he wrote, "Mere exploration and topography I think nothing of. If the Russians can be kept out, there is plenty of time for that; if not, there is no object in knowing the country. It would be far better that we should hide our anxiety and leave the people to settle their affairs with the Russians and Persians as they may. What is of the utmost importance is

1 Note on occupation of Akkal country, *op. cit.*

2 Papers in Secret Progs., Oct., 1878, Nos. 70-86, and Nov., 1879, Nos. 285-86 and No. 328

3 Aitchison to Minister at Teheran, F.D.S.P. 1878, Oct., No. 12

4 Captain Napier's Mission, K.W. No. 2 Secret, Oct., 1878, No. 249-301.

5. K.W. No. 1. Secret, Oct., 1878, No. 427

that the necessity for the exclusion of Russia from these parts should be appreciated, and I think my journey will help to that." He dilated on the effects of Russian moves in the Tekke territory on the British security in India. Napier was successful in visiting Merv and contacting Koushid Khan and other chiefs there, but it is doubtful if he was in a position to render them assistance to oppose Russia.

General Lomakin's Kizil Arvat enterprise in 1877 was abortive, for owing to the Russo-Turkish War, his force was withdrawn, and it seemed doubtful if during the pendency of the Balkan crisis which threatened to bring about an open Anglo-Russian conflict, any early steps could be organized to probe further into the Akkal territory. Meanwhile, as a counterpoise to British preparations in Malta for a swoop on the Straits of Dardenelles and the Bosphorus, Russian military forces were assembling on the Oxus and at Krasnovodsk and diplomacy was active in Kabul and Teheran for threatening the British hold in Asia. The Treaty of Berlin eased the tension, but Lord Lytton still carried out his Afghan adventure; this prevented the Government of India for some time from devoting attention to the Turkoman affairs. And nothing alarming also occurred there. Later, when again Russian forces commenced the subjugation of the Turkoman tribes, Lord Lytton's successor in India as well as the Government in England were not moved by similar feelings of alarm, with the result that by 1882 the whole Tekke territory up to Ashkabad was annexed to the Russian dominions without even a protest. The Governments of India and England submitted to the inevitable and had resort to the only alternative of providing for a delimitation of the frontiers of Afghanistan. The story of these events will now be told briefly.

Subsequent to General Lomakin's disastrous retreat in 1877, no troops could be spared for action on the eastern shores of the Caspian Sea and the Russians there for many months "were obliged to maintain a strictly defensive attitude." But by the end of the year all danger had passed away in Europe and General Lomakin received orders for renewing his campaign against the Akkal Tekkes to bring the western Tekke territory under Russian subjection. Fresh troops assembled at Chikishliar, and soon with the idea of an invasion of India, the force was greatly augmented, and with the signing of the Treaty of Berlin, was available for the invasion of Turkomania. In August, General Lomakin struck camp and soon reached Chat.² His further reconnaissance of the Upper Valley of the

1 Indian Officer, II, p. 118

2 Ibid., pp. 119-20

Attrek to reach Ashkabad did not meet with success owing to the geological aspect of the terrain beyond. After reaching Khoja Kala and having a good view of the Akkal Oasis from the mountains, he was compelled to retreat owing to the distance of his base and the difficulty of maintenance. On his return through the defiles of the Kopat Dagh, his columns were harassed by the Turkomans till they had taken shelter behind the entrenchments at Chat. General Lomakin after leaving a garrison there moved fast to the Caspian, but, soon after, Chat was also taken by the Tekkes who chased the retiring forces to the very skirts of Chikishliar. Thus ended in disaster this fresh attempt by General Lomakin in 1878.¹

A fresh attempt was organised in 1879 and this time a new commandant, General Lazareff, was sent to lead the expedition. He organised a large force consisting of 16 battalions of infantry, 22 sotnias of cavalry and 24 guns, a total of 18,000 men. He had decided on a gradual step by step advance, building up bases on the way and strengthening the line of communication. But unfortunately his death deprived the Russian force of the leadership of a beloved, efficient general, and General Lomakin, as the next senior man, took over the command again. He was keen to wipe out his earlier disgrace and decided to retrieve his position by making a sudden dash on the Tekke stronghold. By September 8, 1879, his small force had reached the neighbourhood of Denghil Teppe, where the Tekkes had resolved to make a stand. The story of his action against the Tekke post is one of "reckless want of judgement," mistaken tactics and dastardly haste, which brought him defeat and disaster again. The bombardment of the fort had led to such a slaughter of men, women and children that the Tekkes begged for respite and sent a deputation, but all in vain. General Lomakin did not halt the slaughter which stiffened the back of the defenders. In the flush of victory and desire to earn glory by assaulting the fortress, he ordered an assault with a force of 1,400 Russian troops which was "the crowning mistake of the battle." The assault was repulsed and soon the Russian forces were rushing back in disorder. This defeat sealed the fate of General Lomakin, and subsequent attempts were to be made by more skilled officers.²

In 1880 the command devolved on Count Skobelev, who had been the father of the plan for the invasion of India and had in 1878 led a mission to Kabul. He now decided to advance cautiously and systematically, and to make no decisive attack

1 Indian Officer, II, pp. 120-5

2 Ibid., II, pp. 126-40

until he had prepared an advanced base at the western extremity of the Akkal Oasis, and had there collected such stores and troops as might be considered necessary for a prolonged campaign."¹ By June he had reached Bami where he erected a fortified depot. To facilitate communication, it was decided, on the suggestion of General Annenkoff, to build a railway from Michaelovsk to Kizil Arvat, and by November 1880, some forty miles of railway had been laid. In December he was ready to move on Denghil Tepe, Yanghi Kala and Gok Tepe, where a force of 40,000 Tekke warriors had assembled "to make an obstinate resistance." This stronghold was ultimately taken by assault at the close of January 1881 when nearly 20,000 Turkomans were killed. Skobelev went in pursuit of the two Tekke leaders, Tekma Sirdar and Makhdum Kuli Khan, who were flying towards Merv, and occupied Ashkabad and Amman. No further advance towards Merv however was undertaken owing to the heavy losses of the Russians.²

The capture of Ashkabad and the occupation of Akkal Oasis gave to the Russians a point of vantage for probing further towards Merv and Herat. As usual the Russian Government doped the British Government with peaceful assurances. On 26th January, 1881, M. de Giers informed Lord Dufferin that with the destruction of the power of the Tekke Turkomans, "the time had come for the Russian Government to show its moderation, and to take care not to allow itself to be entangled in any further military operations in that quarter of the world." The British Government was assured that Merv would not be occupied and the word of the Czar was pledged for it. M. Giers repeated, "Not only do we not want to go there, but, happily, there is nothing which can require us to go there."³ Soon after an Imperial Ukase on May 24, 1881, annexed the Tekke Turkoman territory to the 'Trans-Caspian Territory,' but its boundaries were not defined and were left deliberately vague.⁴ Meanwhile a treaty was signed on December 21, 1881 at Teheran by which the Russo-Persian frontier line was fixed at the fort of Baba Dormuz, and commissioners were to be appointed to delimit the boundaries.⁵ This convention did not include the line towards Herat and Merv, which caused serious mistrust in England and India. But the most important developments were those of Lessep's exploration of the region in the vicinity of Herat for the railway, and the intrigues to

1 Indian Officer, II, p. 148

2 Ibid., Ch. XV

3 Quoted by Indian Officer, II, pp. 165-66

4 Indian Officer, II, p. 167

5 Ibid., p. 170

bring about peaceful absorption of Merv into the Russian empire.¹ This was brought about with the help of secret emissaries like Alikhanoff when, on February 12, 1884, the Merv notables took the oath of allegiance to the Czar and Merv was soon after occupied by the Russian forces.²

The Indo-British reactions to these later developments in the Turkoman territory do not appear to have been as violent as they were earlier. Every step taken by Russia against the Tekkes evoked protest by the British Government and demands for assurance that the integrity of Merv would not be jeopardised. In July 1879 when General Lazareff was preparing to move against the Turkomans, Her Majesty's Government, presumably on the promptings of the Government of India, did not fail to intimate to the Russian Government that they "could not look without dissatisfaction upon any operations which should have the effect of either threatening Merv or encroaching upon Persian territory." The assurance was readily forthcoming; the Russian Government denied having any such designs and pointed out that "the present expedition was directed against the Tekke Turkomans and, if successful, probably would have for its result the construction of a chain of posts uniting Krasnovodsk and Chikishliar by a curved line, of which the extreme point would not be nearer than 250 kilos of Merv."³ It is evident from the statements of M. de Giers and Baron Jomini that at the moment Merv was not the immediate objective of Russian military preparations, but that their purpose was to check the depredations of these tribes by occupying the Akkal Oasis and to "stop at a point some 200 versts upon this side of Merv." But Baron Jomini was frank enough to say that "although we don't intend to go to Merv, or do anything which may be interpreted as a menace to England, you must not deceive yourself, for the result of our present proceeding will be to furnish us with a base of operations against England, hereafter, should the British Government by the occupation of Herat threaten our present position in Central Asia."⁴ It may be admitted that Russian declarations had disclaimed any intention on their part to occupy Merv, but, as M. Giers pointed out, there was always a likelihood that "under different circumstances, and in view of unforeseen contingencies, the occupation of Merv might become necessary."⁵ The happenings

1 Marvin : *The Russian at Merv and Herat*, Ch. III; *Indian Officer*, II. pp. 176-182

2 Ibid., pp. 185-86

3 Salisbury to Dufferin, 9 July, 1879, *Central Asia*, 1880(1) p. 92

4 Dufferin to Salisbury, 16 July, 1879, *Central Asia*, 1880(1) p. 100

5 Dufferin to Salisbury, 26 Aug., 1879, *ibid.*, p. 112

in Afghanistan which appeared to be directed towards the seizure of Herat by the British were bound to have their effect on Russian policy, and it was probable that in the event of that contingency, Merv should be taken by Russia.

Again in 1881, when the Akkal Oasis had been occupied, Ashkabad had become the centre of Russian activity, and secret diplomatic moves were afoot to secure the peaceful submission of Merv chiefs, the Government of India did not remain wholly unconcerned. Her Majesty's Government were once again vigilant and felt apprehensive with every visit of the Merv chiefs to Ashkabad. In April 1881, Giers was again made to tender the assurance that such proceedings did not alter the intention of Russia not "to make any territorial acquisitions in the Merv Oasis,"¹ The assurance was repeated in June "that there was no question of negotiating a Treaty with the Merv Turkomans, or of establishing a Resident there."² Further activities of Russian officers of surveying the country towards Sarakhs and Herat, as well as the agreement with Persia relating to the delimitation of their mutual frontiers, led the British Government also to insist on the diplomacy of delimitation of frontiers which would keep Russian possessions away from approaching Afghanistan. Lord Granville communicated to Prince Lobanov, the Russian Ambassador in London, his desire "to make an arrangement which should prevent any occasion or opportunity for a further advance of Russia towards Afghanistan" by interposing a barrier. The British insistence was for extending such delimitation beyond Baba Dormuz in the direction of Herat. They were prepared to leave the Attrek country and even Merv to Persia, but this was not acceptable to Russia ostensibly on the ground that the arrangement did not guarantee freedom from Turkoman encroachments. Russia had little faith in Persian capacity to govern these tribes and maintain peace. British intention was to limit the further advance of Russia, and for this Giers had no hesitation in 1882 to declare "that they had no desire to advance in that direction," "that Russia had no intension whatever at present of advancing towards Sarakhs or Merv, or of occupying with her forces and territory in that region beyond what was already in her possession."³ But these *demarches* had no effect either in preventing the acceptance of the submission of Merv by Russia or in securing a definite delimitation of frontiers in that region. The Government of India had receded from western

1 Dufferin to Granville, 14 April, 1881; Central Asia, 1881 (2) p. 1

2 Wyndham to Granville, 15 June, 1881, *ibid.*, p. 10

3 Thornton to Granville, 28 June, 1882

Afghanistan and restored that kingdom to its new Amir Abdur Rahman, who was, owing to the fluid situation on his northern and north-western frontiers, assured of support against external threat. And in 1884 Merv had become a definite part of the Russian empire.

The *fait accompli* in contravention of the earlier pledges of the Russian Government and their Emperor, had fulfilled the worst apprehensions of the Government of India and exposed the Russian motives of dominating the land up to the Afghan frontiers, which had been so often hinted by them. The Indo-British governments had neither the resources nor the inclination to endeavour to reverse the inevitable. The news had caused considerable excitement in India and England, and on 22nd February, the House of Commons also indulged in a debate on the subject. But beyond mild protests against the breach of faith and hope that due and satisfactory provision would be made "against the complications to which this further extension of Russian sovereignty in the direction of the frontiers of Afghanistan may give rise,"¹ no drastic measures were taken at the time. The main safeguard then contemplated was the fixing of the boundary between Afghanistan and Russia which would end the fear of Russian encroachments. On March 12 Thornton asked M. Giers about the extent of the Merv territory to which the latter replied "that it would reach to the eastward to the Oxus, and to the south to the northern frontier of Afghanistan from Khoja Saleh to the Tedgend," He further added that he had earlier proposed "that that boundary should be agreed upon and laid down."² In his letter to the British Ambassador, M. de Giers, on March 17, 1884, made this explicit. He wrote, "In case the Cabinet of London should find it useful and practicable to complete these arrangements by a more exact definition of the condition of the countries which separate the Russian possessions from the boundaries of Afghanistan, we can only recall to them the proposal which the Ambassador of His Majesty the Emperor was ordered to make in 1882. The proposal was to continue from Khodga Saleh westward the line of demarcation agreed upon in 1872-73. Her Majesty's Government hesitated at that time to give an opinion upon this proposal. If they desire to resume the negotiation the Imperial Cabinet would willingly concur."³ This gesture was accepted by Lord Granville, who wrote to Thornton: "The advance of Russia towards the frontiers of Afghanistan gives an increased

1 Granville to Thornton, 29 Feb., 1884, Central Asia, No. 2 (1885) pp. 7-13

2 Thornton to Granville, 12 March, 1884, Central Asia, No. 2, 1885 p. 13

3 Giers to Thornton, 17 March, 1884, *ibid.*, p. 19

importance to the question of the definition of the boundaries which divide that State from the territories under the influence of Russia, and Her Majesty's Government are prepared to accept the proposal put forward in 1882 and now repeated by M. de Giers, for the delimitation of the frontier of Afghanistan from Khodga Saleh westwards. You will inform M. de Giers of this decision, and you will add that Her Majesty's Government are of opinion that it would be desirable that the principal points of the boundary line should be laid down on the spot, and that a Joint Commission, including an Afghan representative, should be appointed for that purpose, and should commence operation next autumn."¹ Thus ended the tension roused by the Russian designs on Merv.

¹ Granville to Thornton, 29 April, 1884, Central Asia, No. 2, 1886, *ibid.*, p. 27

CHAPTER IX

SHER ALI'S DESIRE FOR SECURITY

IN the background of these developments in Central Asia we will now examine the relations of the Government of India with the Amir of Afghanistan which culminated in the war fever of 1878, and the consequent settlement with Kabul which formed the foundation of Indo-British foreign policy for a long time.

We have traced earlier the policy which had been gradually evolved towards Afghanistan, but, even at the risk of some repetition, it may be relevant here to restate the essential features of the policy pursued by Sir John Lawrence and Lord Mayo. On 26th December, 1867, the Secretary of State had clearly outlined the policy of Her Majesty's Government as "not to interfere in the internal conflicts of the Afghans, so long as they do not jeopardise the peace of the frontier, or lead to the formation of engagements with other powers dangerous to the independence of Afghanistan, which it long has been and still is the main object of our policy in that part of the world to maintain." In case of the danger of any party in Afghanistan invoking foreign aid, the Government of India would be justified in giving "material support to their rivals." The form of such aid to the Ruler of Kabul was to be "a subsidy or of a grant of arms, and not by any advance of our troops." "Such an advance," it was rightly emphasised, "would in all probability give occasion for grave misapprehensions as to our intentions, and might lead to serious complications."¹ Not long after, Lawrence's Government further defined this non-interference when they wrote : "We object to any active interference in the affairs of Afghanistan by the deputation of a high British officer with or without a contingent, or by the forcible or amicable occupation of any post or tract in that country beyond our own frontier, inasmuch as we think such a measure would, under present circumstances, engender irritation, defiance, and hatred in the minds of the Afghans, without in the least strengthening our power either for attack or defence."² At the same time, nevertheless, to ensure non-aggression by Russia, Lawrence

1 Despatch No. 15 from Secretary of State. 26 Dec., 1867. Afghanistan Correspondence, 1878 (C-2190) No. 12, p. 25, paras 6 & 9.

2 Despatch No. 1 of 1869, Government of India, Foreign Department to Secretary of State, 4 Jan., 1869, *ibid.*, No. 14, p. 44, para 5.

desired that "endeavour might be made to come to some clear understanding with the Court of St. Petersburg as to its projects and designs in Central Asia, and that it might be given to understand, in firm but courteous language, that it cannot be permitted to interfere in the affairs of Afghanistan, or in those of any State which lies contiguous to our frontier . . . A mutual good understanding between the two Powers, though difficult of attainment, would enable us to take means to counteract unfounded rumours and to prevent unnecessary alarms."¹ In brief, the policy initially was to strengthen the position of the new Amir and secure his goodwill, while at the same time ensuring his security against Russian aggression by agreement as to the limits of her southward advance.

Amir Sher Ali had been given some money and arms which had helped him to establish his rule in Kabul by expelling his rivals. But he must have been conscious of the weakness of his position both owing to the possibility of internal strife and external aggression invoked by his rivals. The phenomenal Russian expansion beyond the Oxus and the rapid collapse of the resistance of Khokand and Bokhara, together with the refuge given to Abdur Rahman Khan in Tashkand, strengthened his fear. Though the civil war had ended, Afghan Turkistan which lay to the north of the Hindu Kush was "imperfectly subject" to Amir Sher Ali, and its affairs were still to be settled; it was feared that it might become a suitable soil for Russian intrigues. How far the Amir was contaminated by the Russophobia which governed the views and policies of a large section of Anglo-Indian opinion in India and England is not known, but being close to the scene of Russian aggressions and himself being directly concerned in her further expansion, it will be unnatural to suppose that he could remain an unconcerned observer of the developments in Central Asia. Yet it appears that at this stage Amir Sher Ali was more impelled by motives of protection against internal dangers. Even in the long talks with Lord Mayo at Ambala, the Amir did not prominently mention the matter of Central Asia. Lord Mayo wrote that Amir Sher Ali "is so intent on establishing himself on the throne of Cabul, that he appears to think very little of either Russia or Persia."² "It was not against external attack" that the Amir at the moment desired a binding British guarantee. Mayo informed Argyll after the Ambala conference "that during all the Ameer's conversations here, he has hardly ever mentioned the name of Russia.

1 Despatch No. 1 of 1869 to Secretary of State, *ibid.*, para 9.

2 Mayo to Argyll, 18 April, 1889, Argyll, p. 273

Whether it is that he is so wrapped up in his own affairs, or knows little of their proceedings, he does not give them a thought, and when we have casually referred to them, he generally says that we shall not hear much of them in Afghanistan for a long time.”¹

The prior danger for him in the early stages, therefore, was of internal insurrections and the overthrow of his power and his dynasty from the throne. It was no imaginary fear, and after a long gruelling civil war with his brothers and nephews it was quite natural too. The money and arms placed at his disposal by Lawrence had effectively turned the wheel of fortune in his favour. He was conscious of the value of such assistance and desired more money and arms to stave off his Government being weakened. He was grateful to the Government of India for helping him to his throne, and further sought a “guarantee for himself and for his family, as the rightful rulers of Afghanistan.” He had experience of the effectiveness of such aid in internal strife and would have been keen, in his none too strong position in the country, to secure not only the goodwill of his all-powerful neighbour but also to demonstrate the solidarity of his friendship with the British to discourage any likely rivals against his authority. The value which he thus placed on British amity and support led him to desire the establishment of these relations on stable foundations, which, not being flexible, would not be a prey to the passing whims of every succeeding Viceroy. The Treaty of 1855 entered into by his father with the Government of India was one-sided and did not comprise stipulations to cover the new situation. Hence he was keen to have a definite treaty of defensive and offensive alliance which should be binding equally on both the parties and ensure his position and his dynasty on the throne. This is the background in which the Ambala Conference was agreed to; Amir Sher Ali's keenness is evident from the fact that despite the trouble in Afghan Turkistan he was prepared to meet the Viceroy, if necessary, even in distant Calcutta. That he agreed to leave his country for a few weeks and confided in the Government of India, at a time when the stability of his throne was threatened, is an eloquent testimony to the high value which he attached to British friendship and the difficulty of his position which depended for its strength on British support and amity.

On the other hand, as has been discussed in an earlier chapter, the Government of India also desired to maintain a strong and friendly ruler on the throne of Kabul on whom “our relations with him shall confer real and substantial benefits,” but did not wish these to be “of a character to shackle us in case we

¹ Argyll, p. 262

discovered that he was not acting towards us in good faith."¹ The conditions to be attached to such assistance were not to be exacting; Lawrence was content with "general fidelity," "courtesy to the Native Agent," such control by the Amir "over all of the tribes on the frontier which are subject to him as will prevent their making raids at any time into British territory, and that he will not allow these tribes to give asylum to criminals from our districts," and finally the right to "send Native Agents also at any time to Candahar, Herat, or other important places within the Afghan territories, should we desire to do so."² Contrary to the clamour by many responsible persons for British agents to be established in Afghanistan, and their emphasis on the necessity of holding forward positions and the right to station troops on the northern frontiers of Afghanistan, Lawrence had definitely set his foot on the possibility of British officers being placed in that country as well as on any offensive and defensive alliance or even a fixed subsidy. Thus while Amir Sher Ali desired a meeting with the representative of the British Government in India to strengthen his position at home and to ensure the stability of his dynasty, the Government of India, unruffled by the anti-Russian hysteria of Rawlinson and his group, was not prepared to go beyond mere assertions of goodwill and occasional support at its discretion.

At the Ambala Conference the fears and suspicions of Amir Sher Ali were distinctly projected. He had sought this meeting to strengthen the ties of friendship with the Government of India and to secure from them such guarantees as would stabilise his position in his country. We have already discussed Lord Mayo's policy on the occasion, yet it may not be irrelevant here to draw attention to the conversations there to bring into relief the aspirations and demands of the Amir and the extent of satisfaction which he could derive from the assurance given by the Viceroy. From the extracts quoted by the Duke of Argyll from the correspondence between Lord Mayo and himself, we get a glimpse of what passed in the mind of Amir Sher Ali and the underlying motives of Lord Mayo's policy.³ It is clear, firstly, that the Amir was not content with the one-sided Treaty of 1855, whose terms were "extremely unequal as regards the obligations imposed on the two contracting parties." As the Duke of Argyll puts it "on the part of the Ameer, it was a Treaty of Alliance, offensive and defensive. On the part of

1 Lawrence's Minute, 25 Nov., 1868. *Afghan Correspondence* 1878, p. 68, para 41

2 Ibid. para 38

3 Argyll, pp. 253-8

the Indian Government it had no such character.”¹ Therefore the Amir had a genuine grievance against what he styled a “dry friendship” which had brought him no aid in the war against his brothers, and keenly desired a treaty of offensive and defensive alliance equally binding on either party. Secondly, he desired a guarantee for himself, not a mere *de facto* but a *de jure* recognition not only for himself, but also for “his heirs of blood,” “as the rightful rulers of Afghanistan.” Thirdly, he wanted a fixed annual subsidy.² The whole trend of the discussions on 29th March with the Amir, as also the conversations held with his Minister, clearly reveal his anxiety to bind the Government of India to definite relations which would have the effect of making his enemies the enemies of the British. These enemies were ostensibly internal enemies, for Lord Mayo has categorically denied any reference being made by the Amir to the fear of Russia or any other external foe. The attitude of Lawrence in giving recognition to every passing prince on the throne of Kabul and the apprehension of future trouble from his own kith and kin were the incentives for Amir Sher Ali’s insistence on an alliance of such a character.

But what led the Amir to suppose that success would crown his negotiations? It may be speculated that he might have been influenced by the ready support in money and arms which was then being heaped on him to fortify his position in Kabul. It is also not unlikely that he was conscious of the British jealousy of Russia and the key position which Afghanistan occupied in any plans of offence or defence against the Imperial Power in Central Asia. There is no doubt that he was aware of the desire of the British to have a strong and friendly ruler in Kabul, and from the manner of the aid proffered to him he might have concluded that the Government of India was keen to see him stabilise his hold on his country. But, on his part, while anxious for stability and support, he was not prepared to submit to any conditions which negatived the very basis of his sovereignty; and it appears that one matter on which his suspicion was easily provoked was the stationing of a British envoy or British agents in his country. The Duke of Argyll has indicated the “jealousy of the Ameer and of his Minister on the subject of European Agents of the British Government.” He mentions, on the authority of Lord Mayo’s letter to him of 4th April, that when Nur Muhammad was asked on 1st April, “Would the Ameer sanction native Agents in Afghanistan, whether as visitors or as permanent residents, supposing the

1 Argyll, p. 260

2 Ibid., pp. 260-1

British Government wished it," he "did not wish to commit himself," and showed the suspicion and the fear which was deeply rooted in the mind of every Afghan by "asking, rather anxiously, whether European Agents were intended."¹

Thus Amir Sher Ali, naturally apprehensive about his position, had come to India to seek effective guarantees and assurances against his enemies, deepen the foundations of his dynasty and make the agreement between the two countries unequivocal and inevitable. The price which he was prepared to pay was abiding friendship and alliance against all enemies of the British, but he was loath to agree to one condition, that of the appointment of European Agents in his country, which he believed to be suicidal for his very existence. Lord Mayo realised the keenness of his feelings and took every step to blunt the edge of his suspicions. It may be that to secure "an absolute dynastic guarantee", he might have consented to "very hard terms . . . the very hardest of those terms would have been the admission of resident British officers in his dominions."² But the Viceroy did not wish to exploit this uncertain advantage which he believed to "be really injurious, under existing circumstances, to the authority of the Ameer."³ Hence, while assuring the Amir of support, the Government of India did not desire that this support should be manifested in a form which might suggest the idea of his "being maintained mainly by extraneous aid."⁴ The Viceroy therefore made an unequivocal declaration not to interfere in the internal affairs of Afghanistan and not to send British troops or Residents to that country. He explained to the Amir that "under no circumstances was he to expect that British troops would cross the frontier to put down civil war or domestic contention," and further that no European officers would be placed as Residents in his cities.⁵ Promise of help when the Government of India considered it necessary was given, but neither an alliance beyond the Treaty of 1855 was agreed to nor any dynastic guarantee was given to the Amir. All that was stated was that the Government of India would "view with severe displeasure any attempt to disturb your position as Ruler of Cabul, and rekindle civil war."⁶

How far the Ambala Conference succeeded in soothing the fears of Amir Ali is a moot question. Of course he did

1 Argyll, p. 270

2 Ibid., p. 269

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Despatch to Secretary of State, 3 April, 1869; Argyll, pp. 263-4

6 Mayo's letter to Amir, 31 March, 1869.

not get what he intensely desired. Yet the general tenor of the statements and talks of the Viceroy and his Foreign Secretary, as well as the sincerity and friendliness of the whole scene must have had the effect of giving the Amir the impression that his interests were in safe hands and that he could, not without justification, expect effective support in a crisis. He could also go back with the conviction that it was in the interest of the British Government to safeguard the integrity of his dominion against external aggression or internal factions. But the greatest assurance which he cherished was that the British would not interfere in his affairs and that the dreadful prospect of entertaining British officers as Residents had receded. Even though he did not achieve his object of a binding, reciprocal alliance, he could at least go back with some confidence that his friends did not at the moment contrive to deprive him of his independence.

As for the Government of India, the policy outlined at Ambala was to define and limit the engagements and intentions which existed between Afghanistan and India. The Government of India in their despatch of 1st July, 1867, clearly explained the character of this agreement. They wrote, "The policy that we had endeavoured to establish may be termed an intermediate one, that is to say, that while we distinctly intimated to the Ameer that, under no circumstances, should a British soldier ever cross his frontier to assist him in coercing his rebellious subjects; that no European officers would be placed as Residents in his cities; that no fixed subsidy or money allowance would be given for any named period; that no promise of assistance in other ways would be made, that no treaty would be entered into obliging us under *every* circumstance to recognize him and his descendants rulers of Afghanistan, yet that we were prepared by the most open and absolute present recognition, and by every public evidence of friendly disposition, of respect for his character and interest in his fortunes, to give all the moral support in our power, and that in addition we were willing to assist him with money, arms, ammunition, native artificers, and in other ways, whenever we deemed it possible or desirable to do so." But such assistance was to be rendered in a "way which would neither entangle us in any engagements which might prove embarrassing nor weaken his independence."¹ The undertaking not to send any British troops or Resident was given in most emphatic terms as in the words of the Government of India "we were given to understand that he would decidedly object to any armed interference

1 Despatch to Secretary of State, 1 July, 1869, para 15.

on our part. We also know that such is the present state of feeling in Afghanistan, that if it was supposed that the Ameer had asked for or acquiesced in the advance of a British force into his territory it would probably cost him his throne."¹ Beyond this altruistic motive, there was also the fear of being involved in the complications of a civil war which Mayo apprehended would arise owing to the intense desire of Amir Sher Ali to proclaim his youngest son, Abdulla Jan, as his successor to the throne in preference to his eldest son, Yakub Khan. This fear together with its adherence to the policy of not interfering in the internal affairs of that country, governed the policy which was then prescribed by the Government of India for itself. The pledge not to send any British officers into that country, or allow British troops to cross the frontiers, was a solemn pledge which, in the absence of any countervailing advantages to the Amir, alone could give him an assurance of the friendly intentions of the British rulers. The success of the Ambala Conference was not exaggerated by Lord Mayo's Government when they wrote, "No one can foretell what the course of events in Central Asia may be ... A single rash act on the part of the Ameer may again imperil his throne, and foreign intrigue, or some bold deed of arms on their own part, may render Azim Khan and his nephew or even other rivals again formidable. But for the present civil war has ceased and the man whose nominal rule extends from the Oxus to the Helmund, from Herat to the gates of Peshawar, has, while seated on the throne of his father, professed himself our true and faithful ally."²

The Ambala policy had its implication on the international status of Afghanistan also. Though no treaty engagement was entered into, yet it was clearly understood that as "the complete independence" of that country was "so important to the interests of British India," "the Government of India could not look upon an attack upon Afghanistan with indifference."³ But such assistance would be morally binding only if Amir Sher Ali's relations with his neighbours were amenable to India's advance and control. And it appears this understanding was recognized on either side, for soon after the Ambala Conference the British Government was negotiating with the Russian Government for the delimitation of their mutual spheres of influence and had acknowledged the obligation to restrain the Amir from meddling in the affairs of Bokhara, in case Russia would agree to consider Afghanistan as lying outside her zone of inter-

1 Despatch to Secretary of State, 1 July, 1869, para 59.

2 Ibid., paras 66-7.

3 Viceroy to Secretary of State. Telegram No. 1414 P., 27 June 1873.

ference. Amir Sher Ali, too, had no objection to this and readily fell into line with the efforts made by the Government of India to define his boundaries both as against Russia and Persia.

Reviewing the whole course of the developments in Ambala and soon thereafter, we may hold that Amir Sher Ali was apprehensive of his security, both internal and external, and that the Government of India, while keeping itself free from any definite and legally binding obligations, gave him such assurances as had the character of strengthening his position as against his rivals internally and protecting him against external aggression. The assurances were directed even against any future aggressive designs by the British themselves, for without these there could be no abiding trust, and the certainty of Afghan friendliness and the Amir being a faithful ally would have been lacking. The engagements, though not defined in a legal document, were clear enough and had the moral effect of a solemn declaration, which was reinforced by grants of money and ammunition without a *quid pro quo*. Amir Sher Ali had reason to be dissatisfied for it did not fulfil his desire to secure British guarantee for the succession of Abdullah Jan; but viewed as a whole, Lord Mayo's policy was in the interest of the Amir as well as in that of India, and the fact that the Amir did loyally adhere to it and abided by the advice and wishes of the Government of India, as long as that policy was strictly adhered to, is an eloquent testimony to his recognition of the advantages accruing from it, and the sense of security which he associated with it.

For some time immediately after the Ambala Conference nothing happened to disturb seriously the equanimity of the Amir. It may be conceded with the Duke of Argyll that Amir Sher Ali was not "really satisfied or that, if he was so for a moment his discontent did soon return," particularly because he failed to get effective assurances of help in the event of internal trouble.¹ But it will be equally true to state that he did not entertain any apprehension of external danger or major internal dissensions, and that he believed that in their own interest and in pursuance of the objects of their Central Asian policy the British would come to his aid, when the occasion arose for it. It may even be surmised, as the Duke of Argyll implies and as is evident from a study of the documents of this period, that the Amir was keen to exploit British interests to enlarge the scope of the understanding arrived at Ambala. He was aware of the efforts made by the British Government to

¹ Argyll. p. 277

secure the declaration of non-interference by Russia in the affairs of Afghanistan and its desire to get the recognition of Afghanistan as a state within the British sphere of influence. But he had not taken any active interest in the trend of these negotiations and whatever was being done, even in the matter of the formal fixing of his northern boundaries, was not on his initiative or with his active consent. He had conformably to the wishes of Lord Mayo, and possibly to earn British support, or for fear of provoking Russian antagonism, refrained from interfering in the politics of Bokhara or annexing Kirkee and Charjui on the Oxus which he considered essential for the security of his kingdom.¹ But it does not appear that he saw the logic of that course or had any trust in his northern neighbour. It is also apparent that Sher Ali was not prepared to permit the violation of his territory by the visit of any British officer, howsoever temporary might be the purpose of such sojourn. His suspicions would revive at the least suggestion of a British envoy or the likelihood of an agreement between the two Imperialist Powers, Russia and England, as regards his state. Mayo and Northbrook both strove to keep him in good humour by giving him no cause for umbrage.

An important development at this time was the correspondence between the Russian Governor-General of Turkistan and Amir Sher Ali. The first letter of General Kauffmann, dated 28-30th March, 1870, was received in Kabul about the middle of May and naturally excited alarm and misapprehensions there.² It was reasonable, for the Amir seems to have had no definite information, till then, of the negotiations carried on by Mr. Forsyth and the British Government at St. Petersburg for the creation of a belt of buffer states. It is clear from the Viceroy's letter to Amir Sher Ali of 24th June, 1870, that, in view of the policy agreed to, instructions had been sent to Kauffmann "to the effect that, as the Government of India had taken measures to carry out the understanding come to with Mr. Forsyth, the Russian authorities should act in a similar spirit, and should make it known that England and Russia are agreed as to the policy that should be followed with a view to securing the tranquillity of the countries on their respective borders, and the peace of Asia."³ Kauffmann's letter to Kabul was in implementation of that policy and wished for "permanent peace and friendship" and declared his wish not "to meddle with the affairs of the State of Afghanistan." He also stated that

¹ Despatch to Secretary of State, Foreign Dept., No. 69, 30 June, 1873.

² *Central Asia*, 1878, (No. 1), pp. 182-3

³ Viceroy to Amir, 24 June, 1870, *ibid.*, pp. 184-5

Afghanistan was "under the protection of the British Government." He further made it known to the Amir that he would not render any aid to Abdur Rahman Khan and that Bokhara and Afghanistan should have no concern with the affairs of each other.¹ The Viceroy saw in this letter the resolution of the Russian Government "to adhere to this policy of peace" and considered the letters as "a source of satisfaction and an additional ground of confidence to your Highness, because they indicate that, so long as you continue the course you have so happily pursued since the visit you honoured me with at Umballa, it is most unlikely that your territories will be disturbed by Russia or by any tribe or State which may be influenced by the officers of the Emperor."² But while Lord Mayo obtained "unfeigned satisfaction" and hoped for the stability of peace, the Amir's reaction was just the contrary. He was much troubled and felt a sinister significance in this approach. His fear was not only that Russian officials might establish themselves on the borders of Afghanistan and endanger their protection, but more so "as to what may have been said by Russia to the British Ambassador at her Court as to her meaning and intention in writing such letters, or what the Ambassador may have learnt as to such intentions, or what action may have been taken, or be about to be taken, by the British Government in the matter."³ This attitude is symptomatic of his suspicion that England and Russia might agree to partition the lands of Central Asia between themselves which would spell ruin for Afghan independence, for in the rivalry between the two empires was an assurance of the integrity of weaker states.

This letter had been sent to Lord Mayo for the indication of the lines of reply, and all subsequent letters which followed from Kauffmann were similarly communicated by the Amir to the Government of India. Such correspondence, as the Duke of Argyll has rightly observed, was not barred by the understanding between Russia and England, and for many years nothing objectionable did either appear in the letters.⁴ All they contained were assurances of friendship and an exhortation to the Amir not to "interfere with the neighbouring country of Bokhara" and occasional information of the Russian successes against opposition by the Khanates of Central Asia.⁵ The Government of India did not prevent the Amir from receiving them;

1 Kauffmann to Amir Sher Ali, 28 March, 1870, *ibid.*, p. 183

2 Viceroy to Amir, 24 June, 1870.

3 Pollock to Thornton, 26 May, 1870, *Central Asia*, No. 1, 1878, p. 180.

4 Argyll II, p. 295

5 Kauffmann to Sher Ali, 30 March, 1870, 20 Dec., 1870, 28 Oct., 1871, and other letters.

on the contrary, they encouraged him in this course and even when, as reported by the Agent in Kabul, the courtiers there scented unseemly designs, the Viceroy did not consider the contact otherwise than fruitful of peace and security.¹ There is also no ground to suppose that at the moment the appreciation of the Government of India was other than realistic. In the three years following the approach by Lord Granville, as has been mentioned in an earlier chapter, the Russian Government had admitted the extension of the Afghan kingdom up to the Oxus, and had agreed to delimit the boundaries as defined by the Government of India. The policy of non-aggression and non-interference towards Afghanistan had been reiterated more than once, and the principle that Britain was the protecting power of Afghanistan had also been fully recognised.

Another development which later had serious repercussions was the eagerness of the Government of India to secure entry for British officers into the kingdom of Afghanistan. It has been mentioned earlier that Lawrence was opposed in principle to such a course. But Lord Mayo and Lord Northbrook both appear to have been influenced, as a matter of expediency only, by the difficulties involved in it, and did not want to force British officers on the unwilling Amir or to exploit his necessity for their advantage. Lord Mayo was not oblivious of the advantage of having British Residents, and in one of his letters to the Duke of Argyll before the Ambala Conference, as stated by the latter, he pointed out "as one of the objects he had in view the obtaining of accurate information as to the events that occur in Central Asia." But this was to be done only "if they were acceptable to the Ruler and people of Cabul." He knew "that those favourable conditions did not exist."² Finding the Amir and his Minister so adverse to any proposal of that nature, Lord Mayo does not appear to have referred specifically to the stationing of British agents in that kingdom, rather on the contrary, he had given a definite assurance that no European officers would be posted in the Amir's realm. In the days of Lord Northbrook a suggestion was made twice to allow British officers to pass through Afghanistan, and later in 1874 when Douglas Forsyth was to return from Yarkand a definite request was made to Amir Sher Ali to allow him to pass through his kingdom. Lord Northbrook, in 1873, when the Seistan Boundary dispute and the question relating to the northern boundaries with Russia had been settled, desired to send a British officer to give personal

¹ Letter from Atta Mahomed Khan; 20 July, 1872; Agent at Kabul to Mr. Macnabb, 5 Sept., 1872, Viceroy to Amir; 7 Sept., 1872.

² Argyll, pp. 257-8

explanations to the Amir and had actually made a suggestion on 27th March, that the Amir might receive a British officer at any place in Afghanistan "not as a resident Envoy but on a special mission."¹ Further at the Simla Conference in 1873, the Afghan envoy was asked to lay before the Amir the proposal that in view of the responsibilities undertaken by the British Government on behalf of Afghanistan, and the "imperfect information which they possess regarding the border in respect of which these responsibilities have been incurred, it is considered highly desirable that a British officer of rank, accompanied by a competent staff, should proceed to examine thoroughly the northern and north-western boundary as far as its eastern extremity; it would be advisable that this officer should also visit the Seistan boundary, proceeding thither *via* Candahar and eventually returning by way of Cabul, when he would have an opportunity of conferring with the Ameer regarding the condition of the border and could lay before His Highness any views he may have formed regarding the measures necessary for the security of the entire frontier."² There had been thus a gradual unfoldment of the desire to place British officers in Kabul or to send them on temporary missions, which of course were not acceptable to the Amir and had the effect of rousing his suspicion and alarm.

The responsibilities incurred by the Government of India on behalf of Afghanistan were clearly expounded in 1873 and involved the protection of the country against aggression and restraining the Amir from an aggressive policy towards his neighbours. And realising that Amir Sher Ali was prepared to maintain an attitude of peaceful intentions towards the bordering states, the British Government had "felt no hesitation in undertaking to use their influence to impress upon his Highness the importance of maintaining the peaceful attitude and of allowing no consideration to tempt him to entertain any designs of conquest or aggression beyond the country described in Lord Granville's letter of 17th October, 1872."³ The Amir on his side had done everything to respect the undertaking thus given by the British Government to Russia. The general outline of the northern boundary of Afghanistan had been accepted by both the Imperial Governments, and it appears the Amir's Government had no objection to it. Moreover, the British Government had undertaken to arbitrate the Seistan boundary

1 Argyll, pp. 317-8

2 Memorandum by Aitchison. Afghan Correspondence, 1878, p. 115

3 Viceroy to Amir, 6 Sept., 1872, Afghan Correspondence, 1878, p. 116

dispute in conformity with the Paris agreement with Persia, and without the prior active concurrence of Afghanistan. The Amir, however, had done nothing to obstruct the course of arbitration, though the decision was not palatable to him and he made no secret of his feelings.¹ Even in internal affairs, there had been occasions on which advice was tendered to the Amir, and the instance of his son Yakub's rebellion and the treatment to be accorded to him is an important illustration of such influence exercised by the Viceroy.² That the Amir co-operated and yielded to the friendly advice is an eloquent testimony to the amicable relations established and to his confidence in the good intentions of the Government of India. No unequivocal and concrete guarantees of protection or assistance had been given to him. Yet he was conscious of the fact that the British Government in its own interest would not hesitate to render him effective support if his state was ever threatened by aggression from Russia or even Persia. He seems to have had no hesitation to exploit this advantage either. And though he had failed to gain his objective of a definite alliance and a fixed subsidy, during these years he felt a sense of security, particularly against external danger. He was keen, as has been mentioned earlier, for a dynastic guarantee and also desired definite stipulations for assistance against his rivals to the throne. It may even be surmised, as the Duke of Argyll would lead us to believe, that for this end he was prepared to take advantage of the British fear of Russia and their desire to maintain Afghanistan as a strong buffer.³ In short, it may be admitted that till 1873, in any case, the Amir had not been seriously alarmed by the trend of events in Central Asia and had no occasion to become apprehensive of the designs and methods of British policy. The Government of India also had no reason to doubt the integrity of the Amir and did not have occasion to consider any departure from the policy adumbrated by Lawrence and Mayo.

Early in 1873, when the distasteful Seistan Award was confirmed by the British Government and the transactions relating to the Russo-Afghan border had been finalised, Lord Northbrook deemed it advisable to give "personal explanations" to the Amir "to soothe irritation or prevent misunderstanding", and desired to send a temporary envoy to the kingdom of

1 Amir to Viceroy, 13, Nov., 1873; Argyll II, p. 317; Agent at Kabul to Commissioner, Peshawar, 15 May, 1873.

2 Telegram No. 2470 P, from Foreign Secretary to Commissioner, Peshawar, dated 17 November, 1874; Despatch to Secretary of State, No. 70, Foreign Deptt. Secret, 20 Nov., 1874.

3 Argyll, II, Ch. xiv.

Afghanistan and requested the Amir to receive a British officer in Kabul, Jalalabad or Kandahar. Amir Sher Ali did not entertain such a request and instead preferred to send his Prime Minister to Simla to confer with the Viceroy.¹ The reply containing this suggestion was dated 14th April, and Argyll mentions that long discussions on this topic had preceded the note, in which the Amir "showed great reluctance to abide by the Seistan Award, and a disposition to use" his "assent as a price to be given only in return for certain advantages which he had long desired." He might have considered the possibility of influencing the Viceroy to yield the desired concessions to him and thus close happily the negotiations begun at Ambala four years earlier. The demand for a meeting had its origin particularly in the exigencies of British policy and was in no way born of the Amir's fear of Russian aggression. Hence, what he planned to ask for without a *quid pro quo* involving any sacrifice to himself had relation to his likely internal complications and was in the context of the dynastic guarantee or the recognition of Abdulla Jan, which had been mooted in Ambala and had reference to the equality and reciprocity of engagements between the two Governments. A glimpse into the attitude of the Amir and his court is had from the letter of the Kabul Agent of 5th May, 1873.²

The letter indicates the chagrin of the Afghan ruler at the suggestion for the despatch of a British officer and relates to two matters, the northern frontier of Afghanistan and the Seistan boundary, which were ostensibly the occasion for this demand by the Government of India. The Amir had not sought the conference, and rightly desired to know what fresh developments had occurred in the British negotiations with Russia which called for a confidential communication with him. He referred to the negotiations between Forsyth and the court of St. Petersburg and the information then given to him of the agreement arrived at. Frankly, between Forsyth's visit and this request for the mission of a British officer, apart from the acceptance by Russia of the right of Afghanistan over Badakshan and Wakhan, and the precise definition of the Afghan border by the British Government, no substantial developments had occurred which would demand consultations with the Amir. His suspicion, therefore, that Russia could not be relied on for her word, was natural. In that context he gave expression to his anxieties arising out of the course of Russian expansion in

1 Amir to Viceroy, 22 May, 1873.

2 Agent at Kabul to Commissioner, Peshawar, 5 May, 1873. *Afghan Correspondence*, p. 110.

Central Asia, and indicated the measures which were necessary to counteract aggression from the north for the protection of the Afghan frontier, which in essence was the border of India. He is reported to have said, "It cannot be concealed that it is impossible for the Russians to remain always firm in their negotiations . . . My anxiety which I feel on account of the Russians will never be removed unless the British Government adorns the Afghan Government with great assistance in money and ammunition of war for the troops, and unless great aid is given for the construction of strong forts throughout the northern Afghan border. And further, if an emergency arises for the Afghan Government to oppose the Russians, such opposition cannot take place without the co-operation of the disciplined troops of the British Government. Should the British Government desire that I should at once organise the Afghan troops, and make arrangements for the security of the border against the Russians on a favourable occasion. I think it is impossible to do so. No person has attained his object in this world immediately. It is plainly obligatory on the British Government to show their cordiality in this matter before anything happens."¹ Plainly this statement visualises Russian aggression at some date and explains the necessity for help to Afghanistan in time and before the evil day comes. This assistance was to be in money and ammunition, and even in men if the emergency so demanded. Strengthening of the frontier by the construction of forts and the raising and equipping of Afghan troops were the two desiderata. Earlier in April, he had asked for the procurement of "15,000 three-grooved rifles and 5,000 Snider guns" at any price for him.² Both these statements clearly emphasise his appreciation of the situation and his anxiety to strengthen his military potential at a time when Russian danger was both remote and problematical.

Further the Amir is reported to have said that if the British Government would not be prepared to render such timely aid, the security of Afghanistan could not be guaranteed and in that eventuality the British Government would have to make provision for himself and his family elsewhere. The statement³

1 Afghan Correspondence, 1878, pp. 110-11, enclosure 2 in 26.

2 Ibid. p. 110, enclosure 1 in 26.

3 "It is rather advisable that the British Government for its own and my satisfaction should set apart some property, either in India or in Europe, for my support, in order that if, which God forbid, a serious difficulty constrains me to quit Afghanistan, I may retire there with my family and children, and find both accommodation and maintenance; and after this reassurance, I will work with zeal and high spirit day and night for the security of the border of Afghanistan, which is in truth the border of India." Ibid. p. 111.

attributed to him was meant merely to highlight and emphasise the necessity for effective aid immediately and was not intended to underline his fear or sense of insecurity. His further statement¹ about the direction of Russian menace, *viz.*, from the side of Merv when the Turkomans, being driven out from their homelands, would seek shelter in the Herat area of the Afghan kingdom, was also meant to stress the necessity of timely aid, for the eventuality which he envisaged was not unlikely, though it was mediate.

Subsequently he is reported to have referred to the Seistan affair and made no secret of his resentment and disappointment at the trend of the award. He said, "The injury which will be caused to Afghanistan by the recent decision of the Seistan question is more clear than the light of the sun, and I cannot therefore, in my opinion, accomplish the provisions of this decision." Not only did he point to the injury to his own kingdom but also laid stress on the danger to the security of India by the "cession of the fertile territory of Seistan proper to the Persian Government," which exposed the Indian frontier "as there is a straight road from Merv Shahjahan to India *via* Seistan," and "there will be no person throughout this road to oppose the Russians as far as the border of India."² Finally, he is stated to have appealed for British sympathy for Afghanistan and to give due weight to his views and reflections without which he would have no peace of mind. He cavilled against any temporising and desired strong and effective measures to be taken against a danger which he reflected was not very far off.³

Such were the thoughts of Amir Sher Ali when the proposal was made to him in 1873 for a conference between the two Governments; they reveal a realistic appreciation of the situation in Central Asia and the fears and apprehensions of the British. Whether he was influenced by the Anglo-Indian Russophobia, as Argyll would like to suggest,⁴ or he was led to these conclusions by the gradual probing by Russia in the trans-Caspian region towards Merv, and the information of Kauffmann's expedition against Khiva, or finally by the strategic importance of Merv and the visit of the sons of Koushid Khan of Merv to Kabul,⁵ or by the possible implications of the Seistan Award, or by all these, there is no doubt that his view of the situation was most objective and not inspired by any panic or undue alarm. There is also no doubt that he was

1 Afghan Correspondence.

2 Ibid., p. III

3 Ibid.

4 Argyll II, pp. 323-4

5 Agent at Kabul to Commissioner, Peshawar, 5 May, 1873.

eager to obtain British assistance and the same old guarantees which he had desired at Ambala. He was fortified in this by the help which was given by the Government of India, which he thought was not adequate to meet the situation. It would not be correct to say, as Lord Lytton and Lord Salisbury later implied,¹ that it was the Khivan expedition which had alarmed the Amir and he sought an interview with the Viceroy to explain his helpless situation and to seek further assistance. The circumstances are clear and reveal merely that when Lord Northbrook desired a conference, Amir Sher Ali wanted to avail himself of this opportunity for pressing again his demands for help which, it then seemed to him, were justified in the complexion of events in Central Asia. The Kabul report,² if absolutely reliable, can have no other meaning. It may also be mentioned that the letter gave a substance of occasional statements made by the Amir in his discussions with his courtiers, and it would be wrong to read in these statements any logical continuity or a precise expression of the intentions, views and aspirations of the Amir. However, the Amir, not knowing fully the Viceroy's purpose in suggesting such conversations, decided to depute his Prime Minister, Nur Muhammad Shah, to Simla, where he met the Viceroy in the month of July, 1873.³ This Simla Conference, as it is called, was of great moment for it projects the policy of the Government of India and the attitude of the Amir, before the onset of the developments which culminated in the breach of relations.

At the Simla Conference the main point discussed was that relating to the agreement between Russia and England concerning the northern boundaries of Afghanistan and its implications on the Indo-Afghan relations. In his first interview with Nur Muhammad Shah, Lord Northbrook referred the envoy to the communications between Lord Granville and the Russian Government and specifically explained the British obligations arising therefrom. He said "Russia has now accepted the definition of the northern and western boundaries proposed by the British Government, *who became thus a party to the settlement and interested in maintaining the integrity of the frontier.* The British Government would be prepared to use their best endeavours to maintain the frontier intact as long as the Ameer or the Ruler of Afghanistan follows their advice as regards his external relations, and abstains from encroachments and aggression

1 Lytton's Despatch No. 13, 10 May, 1877; Secretary of State to Viceroy Secret No. 49, 15 Nov., 1878.

2 Agent at Kabul to Commissioner, Peshawar, 5 May, 1873.

3 Enclosure 4 in 26, Afghan Correspondence, p. 111.

on his neighbours." On any violation of such boundaries "by neighbouring countries, or by any tribes under Russian influence," the matter was to be referred by the Amir to the British Government, who would make every effort "to bring about a satisfactory settlement." He further observed "that if, in the event of any aggression from without, British influence were invoked and failed by negotiation to effect a satisfactory settlement, it was probable that the British Government would in that case afford the Ruler of Afghanistan material assistance in repelling an invader." This assistance was to be conditional on the Amir following the advice and abstaining from aggression himself. The Viceroy naturally emphasised that the "influence proposed to be exercised by the British Government referred to the external relations of Afghanistan alone, and that no interference was contemplated in the internal affairs of that kingdom."¹

The envoy reserved discussion on these points for a subsequent meeting. Two things, however, are borne out from the report of the Viceroy's statement. Firstly, the British Government by virtue of the agreement with Russia had undertaken to guarantee the northern frontiers of Afghanistan and was prepared unequivocally to maintain the integrity and strength of that kingdom in the interest of India, for which due assistance was to be rendered at the appropriate moment. Secondly, while every care was taken to assure the Amir that no interference was meant to be exercised in his internal administration and that all that was intended was to regulate his external dealings, it is clear that the agreement now being sought to be imposed on the Amir was in the nature of the treaties of alliance made with the Indian States, in the early days of the nineteenth century, which, while confined to the limitations on foreign relations and defence, had the ultimate effect of controlling the internal government as well. Nur Muhammad Shah appears to have entertained this apprehension and he sought in the second interview to make the position clear. Yet the danger was there, and the Anglo-Russian agreement as to the position of Afghanistan virtually had the effect of making that kingdom a mere protectorate of the British Government, a clear diminution in its international status.

The Viceroy, it seems, was prepared to accept the liabilities of protection and, in the interval between the two interviews, desired Her Majesty's Government to authorise him to make more specific and definite promises of assistance to the Amir. Even before the Simla Conference, Lord Northbrook had

¹ Memo. of Conversation on 12 July, 1873. *Afghan Correspondence*, pp. 111-2

asked permission of the Secretary of State to inform the Kabul envoy of the character of the relations of the Government of India with Afghanistan which had to be communicated to Russia.¹ Paragraph 18 of the Despatch to the Secretary of State of 30th June, 1873,² made no secret of the fact that even without any treaty to that effect, the Government of India regarded the "complete independence of Afghanistan so important to the interests of British India that the Government of India could not look upon an attack upon Afghanistan with indifference." It was also stated that if the Amir continued to follow their advice "he would naturally look for material assistance from us; and circumstances might occur under which we should consider it incumbent upon us . . . to render him such assistance."³ The Secretary of State did not object to its general sense being communicated, but desired "great caution . . . in assuring the Ameer of material assistance which may raise undue and unfounded expectation. He already shows symptoms of claiming more than we may wish to give."⁴ The first interview was held in the light of these instructions. But the Viceroy finding that more definite understanding was essential, telegraphed again to the Secretary of State on 24th July, saying "Ameer of Cabul alarmed at Russian progress, dissatisfied with general assurance, and anxious to know definitely how far he may rely on our help if invaded. I propose assuring him that if he unreservedly accepts and acts on our advice in all external relations we will help with money, arms and troops, if necessary, to expel unprovoked invasion. We to be the judge of necessity."⁵ But the British Government was not prepared for an unambiguous declaration and the Secretary of State replied "Cabinet thinks you should inform Ameer that we do not at all share his alarm, and consider there is no cause for it; but you may assure him we shall maintain our settled policy in favour of Afghanistan, if he abides by our advice in external affairs."⁶ This reply was the basis of the second interview on 30th July, as also of the trend of assurances given to the Amir.⁷ Without going, at this stage, into the motives of the British Government and the wisdom or the un-

1 Telegram to Secretary of State, No. 1414 P. dated 27 June, 1873, Afghan Correspondence, p. 102

2 Despatch to Secretary of State, Secret, No. 70, 30 June, 1873. *ibid.* p. 103

3 *Ibid.*, para 10.

4 Telegram 1 July, 1873 from Secretary of State to Viceroy.

5 Telegram from Viceroy to Secretary of State, 24 July, 1873, Afghan Correspondence, No. 24 p. 108

6 Telegram Secretary of State to Viceroy, 26 July, 1873, *ibid.*

7 Memorandum of interview, Afghan Correspondence, p. 112; Viceroy to Amir, 6 Sept., 1873, p. 116

wisdom of its policy, it may be mentioned that, in essence, the British Cabinet was not averse to rendering help to Afghanistan, rather, on the contrary, it was the settled policy to guarantee its independence against Russian encroachments, but did not wish to make it known to the Amir lest he should be making claims for assistance which would involve serious expenditure or would embroil the British Government in complications there. Russia had been informed of such undertakings of support and the British Government had no hesitation either to render help if it became necessary. Only the Cabinet wanted to keep it vague so far as the Amir was concerned.

In the second interview with the Viceroy on 30th July, the Afghan envoy after seeking certain explanations regarding the settlement with Russia which had reference to the freedom of his country in the matter of its laws and receiving Russian subjects as well as the finality of the arrangements as to the boundary, expressed his doubts about the integrity of Russian promises. He said that the people of Afghanistan and their ruler, despite assurances by Russia, "would rely on definite promises of assistance given by the British Government," and added "it was the expectation of the Ameer that the British Government would aid him with money and arms so that he might be enabled to strengthen his frontier against any possible future aggression." This hope was based on the promises of Lawrence and Mayo "on the strength of which the Ameer had been induced to raise a large body of troops for the defence of his territories."¹ The envoy, thus, made no secret of the expectations of his ruler, and, in the words of the Government of India, "appeared to be under the impression that the British Government are pledged to comply with any request for assistance preferred by the Ameer." The Viceroy, thereupon, took the opportunity to disabuse the mind of the envoy, and through him of the Amir, as to the character and extent of the assurances given by his predecessors. His main purpose was to show that the earlier promises of aid were qualified by the important limitations that "the British Government are to be the judges of the propriety of any request preferred by the Ameer."² Of course, Lord Mayo had reserved the discretion of his Government in the matter of the occasion and extent of assistance, but had stated that such requests by the Amir would be "always treated with consideration and respect." The same assurance was again given by Northbrook.

1 Memorandum of interview, p. 113

2 Memorandum of interview; Despatch to Secretary of State, Secret oN. 75, 15 Sept., 1873.

Next arose the issue of the immediate apprehensions of the Amir and the scope of aid which India could render. It is clear from the "Memorandum of certain points which will be laid before the Ameer by the Envoy"¹ that Nur Muhammad Shah had explained the nature of his fears, which concerned the Russian advance to the frontiers of his country and the "probable establishment by them of cantonments in Kirkee, Charjooee, and other places near the frontier : also the probable entry of the Turkomans into the Badgheis District," and the possible demand by Russia "for political objects" to establish a "Russian Mission and Agents in various parts, or to comply with other demands."² These apprehensions were based on recent developments in Central Asia, though they appear to bear no relation to the Khivan expedition or the Russian moves in Trans-Caspia at the time. In view of the likelihood of inconvenient Russian demands being preferred at any time, the envoy sought definite assurances of support and desired to know the attitude of the Government of India towards these.³

Lord Northbrook had one stock answer to appease these fears, and it was that as "the result of the recent correspondence between England and Russia," his Government did not entertain any apprehensions about the security of Afghanistan; on the other hand, it was strengthened "very materially" by the Russian assurances to respect the integrity of the Amir's kingdom. He did not fear "a Russian invasion of Afghanistan" and said that "the effect of the recent arrangements has been to render the occurrence of such a contingency more remote than ever."⁴ But the envoy did not share the confidence of the Viceroy and desired to know the nature of the assistance which the Viceroy at the previous interview had said the British Government would give in case of an actual unprovoked aggression if the Amir abided by the advice of the Government of India in the matter of his external dealings. He said that the Amir had followed such advice "up to the present time" "as regards abstinence from aggression, and in the event of assistance being given would continue to follow that policy." He pointed out that the assistance proffered "would fail to convey sufficient reassurance" and desired that assistance "should be in the form of a promise to assist that country with money and arms according to the circumstances of the case, in the event of invasions, and if the Ameer should be unable to cope single-

1 Enclosure 6 in No. 26, Afghan Correspondence 1878, p. 115

2 Ibid.

3 Memorandum of interview.

4 Ibid.

handed with an invader, and should prefer a request for troops, the British Government should promise to despatch troops to his aid and withdraw them when the necessity for their employment is over.”¹ The reply of the Viceroy, while conforming to the earlier policy of Lawrence and Mayo and fulfilling the instructions of the Cabinet, did not give that assurance to the Amir which the latter desired at the time when he was eager to strengthen his country against probable danger from the Russian side, in the immediate future. The Viceroy replied, “the British Government did not share the Ameer’s apprehensions, but that . . . it would be the duty of the Ameer, in case of any actual or threatened aggression, to refer the question to the British Government, who would endeavour by negotiation and by every means in their power to settle the matter and avert hostilities. It was not intended, by insisting on such previous reference to the British Government, to restrict or interfere with the power of the Ameer as an independent Ruler to take such steps as might be necessary to repel any aggression on his territories; *but such reference was a preliminary and essential condition of the British Government assisting him.* In such event should these endeavours of the British Government to bring about an amicable settlement prove fruitless, the British Government are prepared to assure the Ameer that they will afford him assistance in the shape of arms and money, and will also in case of necessity aid him with troops. The British Government holds itself perfectly free to decide as to the occasion when such assistance should be rendered, and also as to its nature and extent; moreover, the assistance will be conditional upon the Ameer himself abstaining from aggression, and on his unreserved acceptance of the advice of the British Government in regard to his external relations.”²

The only issues which were raised on this statement by the envoy were two, one asking the Government of India to “consider such aggressor as an enemy” and the other specifically mentioning “the contingency of aggression by Russia” in the “written assurance to be given to the Ameer.”³ These were not acceptable to the Viceroy as they were contrary to the basic elements of British policy.⁴ The Viceroy also desired the Amir not to countenance the opposition of the Turkomans to Russia.⁵ As a result of the Simla Conference and as a means of strengthening the ties between the two Governments, the Viceroy made

1 Memorandum of interview.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

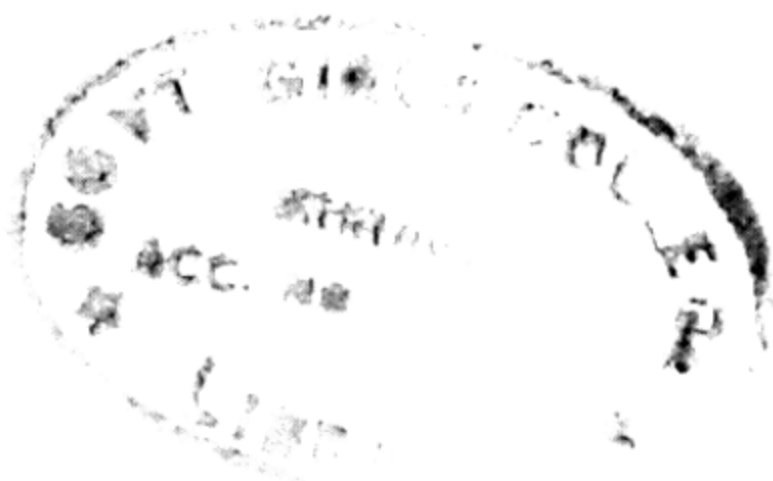
5 Ibid.

available to the Amir 5,000 Enfield rifles and a sum of rupees 15 lacs, with the prospect of sending another 15,000 rifles when received from England. One more point appears to have been raised at the Conference. It related to the despatch of a British officer to examine the boundaries of Afghanistan and discuss the problem of their security with the Amir. Thereby it was hoped "His Highness would thus be enabled, in communication with the British Government, to devise such measures, as, after consultation with this officer, might be deemed best fitted for the defence of Afghanistan . . . the British Government do not anticipate any danger to Afghanistan from without. Still cases might arise in which from imperfect information the interests of Afghanistan might suffer."¹ And the Government of India, in this context, emphasised the importance of accurate information.

A close examination of the substance of the conversations held and the memorandum or letter sent to the Amir reveal the desire of the Government of India to give as full assurances as practicable to the Amir concerning his anxiety to see Afghanistan strong and independent, as well as those relating to assistance in the event of any external aggression against that country. Aid in arms, money and if necessary in troops, was pledged in such a contingency; only this assistance had two limitations, firstly, that it was contingent on the Amir abstaining from aggression and abiding implicitly by the British advice, and secondly, that the Government of India would be the judge of the occasion for it and that assistance would be rendered only when all avenues of peaceful settlement by negotiation or diplomatic pressure had been explored and had failed. Moreover, the solicitude of the Government of India for the integrity of Afghanistan and its absolute protection against Russian aggression was fully apparent. All that Lord Northbrook took pains to impress on the envoy was that his Government had not accepted, and would not accept, the unqualified obligation to assist the Amir in every contingency on his demand. The intention seems to be only to prevent unlimited and unreasonable demands at any time, and not that the Government of India stinted in its help if occasion so demanded. The envoy, on the other hand, seems to have been keen to bind the Government of India unequivocally to a pledge of assistance to the Amir whenever his necessities or apprehensions prompted him to seek aid. He was also eager that Russia should be named the aggressor and an enemy against which the Government of India was bound

¹ Memorandum of certain points, enclosure 6 in 26, Afghan Correspondence, p. 165.

to render assistance at all times. The difference between the two standpoints was merely one of attitude and not that of substance, for as far as British assistance was concerned there could be no doubt of its being operative against Russian encroachments in Afghanistan. The Afghan attitude seems to be that long previous preparation was essential to strengthen the defences and train and equip the army for resisting the invader. For that effective aid beforehand was a desideratum. Hence the Government of India should undertake to make assistance available just at the moment and for the times to come. The British Government, on the contrary, belittled the extent of apprehension of Russian invasion and was opposed to any "blanket sanction" for aid to be drawn upon at will by the Amir. To an objective observer the difference in these attitudes seems to be extremely subjective and one barely productive of disappointments and misgivings. Russian danger was not immediate while the prospect of British aid was so real that it is unlikely that the Amir could have made a serious grievance of the non-fulfilment of his wishes at the Simla Conference. The expression in the Viceroy's letter to the Amir that "To this settlement the British Government are a party, and they are consequently even more interested than before in the maintenance of the integrity of Your Highness's frontier"¹ should have set at rest all doubts, if ever they were there, about the desire of the Government of India to render help to the Amir to keep off the danger of external aggression from his borders. At the Simla Conference, despite the reticence of the Viceroy, a solemn and far-reaching assurance of help had been given to the Amir, and it was unlikely that he should have felt himself insecure by reason of a problematical and mediate fear of Russian aggression. For his sense of insecurity, if at all, we have to seek causes elsewhere.



1 Viceroy to Amir, 6 Sept., 1873.

CHAPTER X

BREACH WITH SHER ALI

THE Simla Conference is a turning point in the history of the Indo-Afghan relations and marks the inauguration of a policy which, being inspired by the developments in the Near East, inevitably led to conflict. At Simla certain undertakings had been given by the Viceroy to the Amir's envoy, and though these did not wholly meet the wishes of Amir Sher Ali, they were adequate to convince him of the desire of the Government of India to support him in the event of external aggression. But owing to their general character and the absence of any treaty obligation equally binding on both, the Amir could not be quite content with the results of the Simla discussions. He was at the same time apprehensive of the extent and character of the agreement between Russia and England on which depended his status as an independent ruler. Moreover, he had given a reluctant consent to the Seistan Award which rankled in his heart as a breach of friendly obligation on the part of his British neighbour. Soon after the Simla Conference, some incidents happened which had the effect of further straining the relations. The first was the nomination of Abdulla Jan as his heir and successor, which was communicated to the Government of India by reason of the existence of "a firm and constant friendship between this State and the British Government."¹ But no previous reference was made to it. Lord Northbrook's Government, true to the old policy, and afraid of the consequences on the peace of Afghanistan owing to the possible attitude of hostility of Yakub Khan, "could not have approved of the measure had we been previously consulted." Yet they could not "have hoped to influence the Ameer's choice in the matter." Hence the reply contained "no opinion as to the wisdom of the step,"² and the letter, couched in the language of 1858 when Sher Ali was nominated heir, merely expressed the wish "that Sirdar Abdoolla Jan, whom with a view to the welfare of your kingdom, you have appointed to be heir-apparent, may, under your Highness's tuition, learn to conduct the Government with the same wisdom and success."³ This reply was in contrast to the warm welcome which was given by the Russian Governor-

1 Amir's letter, 30 Nov., 1873. *Afghan Correspondence* 1878, p. 118.

2 Despatch to Secretary of State, 23 Jan., 1874, *ibid.* p. 117

3 Letter to Amir, 21 Jan., 1874, *ibid.* p. 118

General to the selection by the Amir.¹ Lord Northbrook appears to have laboured under a feeling of remorse for the exclusion of Yakub Khan who, he opined, would not "quietly acquiesce in the nomination of his younger brother" but would assert his rights at a favourable moment. The Viceroy had information of the adverse reactions of the Amir's choice in some other quarters also, and not wishing to be embroiled in a civil war in Afghanistan, did not extend his approbation to the selection by Amir Sher Ali.

Then followed in quick succession the demands for permission to allow Colonel Baker and Douglas Forsyth to pass through the kingdom of Afghanistan, which was declined by the Amir by merely referring curtly to the objections explained by his envoy at Simla. The two letters signifying Amir Sher Ali's refusal to allow British officers to traverse the Afghan soil are characteristic of his state of mind at this time, and express his discontent at the inadequacy of the results of the Simla Conference. He was sarcastic about the reference by Lord Northbrook to the Russo-British agreement relating to his northern frontiers which was hoped to bring peace in that region.² He was suspicious of the designs of Russia and had little faith in her professions of non-aggression. He referred next to the Seistan question and implied that the Award was not in consonance with the Treaty of Paris. Yet in conformity to the wishes of the Viceroy and "out of regard for the British Government", he had issued "strict orders" to his frontier officers "to abstain as before from interference on the Persian border." Lastly, the Amir touched upon the content of British declaration of friendship towards him and remarked that if only the policy followed by Sir John Lawrence and Lord Mayo was to be maintained "it was not necessary to hold all these conversations with Syud Noor Mahomed Shah at Simla. The understanding arrived at in Umballa is quite sufficient." And he took this opportunity of pledging his friendship for the British: "As long as the beneficent Government of Her Majesty the Queen of England continues firm and constant in its friendship

1 Letter dated 25 Feb., 1874. *Corres. Central Asia*, No. 1 (1878), p. 15

2 He wrote "All that has been written regarding the northern boundary. I have fully understood, and I offer my grateful thanks to the Almighty that peace and tranquillity have, priase be to God, been established in all States in perpetuity, and that doubts and disputes have on every side been removed; and that such security has been established in all countries that no aggressions will take place, nor will any power raise discussions or disputes with another within the dominions of that power; and that the use of inimical expressions has been discontinued in diplomatic correspondence, and that peace and tranquillity have been secured to the whole world." Letter dated 13 Nov., 1873. *Afghan Correspondence*, p. 119.

I shall also, please God, remain firm in my sincere friendship, as on the occasion of my meeting at Umballa with Lord Mayo, whose writing I hold in my possession, as also a document from Lord Lawrence. Of this friendship Your Excellency may rest assured."¹

The element of reciprocity is there and allusion is to the pledge given by Lord Lawrence and Lord Mayo that no British officers will be placed in his country without his will. The same sentiment was reiterated in his subsequent letter, in reply to that of Lord Northbrook in which the latter had said that the Simla declarations were intended to give "assurance of support even more explicit than those contained in the auspicious writings of Lord Lawrence and Lord Mayo to which your Highness has referred."² In his next letter the Amir did not deny his faith in the solicitude of the British Government for the interest of his kingdom, but reminded the Viceroy of the assurance given to him earlier about the visit of British officers to his kingdom, and expostulated "that your Excellency, after full and careful consideration of the approval expressed by Her Majesty the Queen, the "Sunnud" of Lord Lawrence and the decision of Lord Mayo, will remain firm and constant in order that Afghanistan and its territories may be maintained inviolate and secure."³ This was a most frank and stern reminder to the Government of India that he would not consent to receive a British officer, whether a casual traveller or an accredited envoy, in his country and that all such requests would be contrary to the pledged word of the British Government.

Another matter which must have alienated Amir's feelings was the intercession of Lord Northbrook on behalf of Yakub Khan, when after the revolt against his father in Herat, he submitted, was brought to Kabul and placed in custody.⁴ On hearing this news, the Viceroy on 17th November, 1874 instructed the Agent in Kabul to deliver the following message to the Amir⁵ :

"The Viceroy has been informed that Sirdar Mahomed Yakoob Khan came to Cabul under a safe conduct from the Ameer, and that notwithstanding the safe conduct he has been placed in custody by His Highness. The Viceroy as a friend and well-wisher to the Ameer, hopes this report is untrue, and desires strongly to urge His

1 Letter dated 13 Nov., 1873. Afghan Correspondence, p. 119

2 Viceroy to Amir, 23 Jan., 1874, *ibid.* p. 120.

3 Letter from Amir, 10 Apr., 1874. *ibid.* p. 123

4 Despatch to Secretary of State, Secret No. 70, 29 Nov., 1874 and Enclosures, *ibid.* p. 124.

5 Telegram No. 2470 P from Foreign Secretary to Deputy Commissioner, Peshawar, 17 Nov., 1874, *ibid.* p. 126.

Highness to observe the conditions under which the Sirdar has come to Cabul. By so doing the Ameer will maintain his good name and the friendship of the British Government. The Viceroy would be glad to receive early assurances to this effect, and to be correctly informed of what has taken place."

This was an unwanted and unauthorised interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, and the domestic concerns of the Amir. The language used could lend itself to the interpretation that the British friendship was contingent on the Amir observing the alleged guarantees given to his son, and was bound to cause resentment and ill-feeling in Kabul. At the Afghan Court, the association of Yakub Khan with Persia was adverted to and surprise was expressed that the Viceroy should have deemed it necessary to interfere in the affairs between the father and the son. They said "it is not heard that there is any room (for claim) for the fulfilment of conditions and stipulations between son and father. The British Government has sent a communication in this private affair between the son and the father, and we do not understand as to what is their real object as regards the interests of Afghanistan. The Ameer will have to endure a heavy injury to State and private matters in the release of Sirdar Mahomed Yakoob Khan."¹ The Amir also did not conceal his chagrin when he observed that "sincere, intelligent friends, owing to their sound judgement and farsightedness, do not like under any circumstances to put their faithful friends to such shame," referring to this intercession on behalf of his undutiful son; and made a spirited protest against the statement of the Viceroy implying the effect of this conduct on the friendship between the two states. He said, "As regards the friendship existing between the two Governments, by the help and grace of God, it is being confirmed and consolidated every day and every minute. Neither on the part of the British Government nor on the part of the Afghan Government does any unsuitable action occur against (or opposed to) the purport of former written or verbal communications which might tend to any sort of displeasure or annoyance to his Excellency. By the grace of God, in future also the friendship existing between the two Governments will continue to increase."²

It may be appropriate here to advert to the developments in Central Asia which had excited alarm in certain British

1 Agent at Kabul to Commissioner, Peshawar, 14 Dec., 1874, *Afghan Correspondence*, 1878, p. 127

2 *Ibid.*

circles and affected considerably British policy towards Russia as well as towards Afghanistan. The Russian expedition to Khiva, the subsequent surrender of its Khan and the occupation of the Khivan territories on the right bank of the Oxus as well as the construction of forts at some places, all occurred soon after the Simla Conference. At the same time the Turkomans of Merv and the territories between the Oxus and the Caspian Sea attracted Russian attention, which was considered to be the preliminary to their ultimate absorption in the Russian empire. In 1875 Khokand also merited a serious Russian military expedition, the result of which was complete assimilation of that state into the Russian territories. The Russian Foreign Office had been continuously, and it may be presumed sincerely, repeating to the British Government its conviction that every expansion of dominion was detrimental to the Imperial interests and positively against its wish, though it did not desist from indicating that the attitude of Russia towards the Turkomans or other Central Asiatic tribes would depend on their behaviour and peacefulness. But these protestations of non-aggression failed to lull the suspicions and fears of the British Government wholly. In what manner these events reacted on Amir Sher Ali is difficult to state, but it will be unnatural to expect that he remained unruffled by the lengthening shadows of Russian possessions so close to his frontiers. It has been already mentioned that he referred at the Simla Conference to the consequences of Russian action against the Turkomans. But whether he felt alarmed by the Khivan, Tekke and Khokand episodes, or had faith in the protective power of the British Government, or believed in the good intentions of Russia which had pledged not to interfere in the affairs of Afghanistan, is difficult to assess. Neither the Kabul Diaries nor any communications from the Amir give an insight into his mind or feelings. The equanimity with which he received communications from the Russian Governor-General in Turkistan and replied to them, the steadfastness with which he acted on the instructions of the Government of India in rendering advice to the Turkomans to desist from aggression, and the care with which he himself refrained from any action beyond his frontiers which could be construed as aggression or unwarranted interference, give the impression of his being unaffected by feeling of alarm or distrust in the friendliness of the Government of India and their desire to assist him.

Yet with the change of Government in England, we find gradually unfolding a policy which was greatly distrustful of

Russia and was seeking independence of action for the British in Central Asia. Lord Salisbury did not accept Russia's interpretation of the agreements made earlier, that these had left to her "full liberty of action upon every portion of territory situated between the Russian frontiers and Afghanistan," and feared that "if the present claim be allowed to pass unchallenged, it may, sooner or later, lead to complications affecting Indian interests, in regard to Merv." This led him to desire a similar "liberty of action in all contingencies and in all quarters" to be "reserved to the British Government."¹ The fear of Merv and Turkoman territory falling to the Russians and the consequences to the Indian security arising therefrom, which have been discussed earlier, prompted the British Government to determine upon certain measures which substantially affected the trend of Indo-Afghan relations. Closer approach to Yarkand-Kashgar, the desire to exploit the treaty with the Khan of Kalat for stationing British troops in Quetta, the eagerness to render assistance to the Merv Turkomans and the keenness for more intimate relations with Afghanistan involving the posting of British agents on the Afghan frontier at Herat, etc., are all symptoms of a new imperialism which was activated by Russian expansion in Central Asia and her designs in the Near East. Merv became the focus of British diplomacy and crystallised their fears and apprehensions. To anticipate Russia in that direction became a new obsession, but the impracticability of establishing direct influence there without active acquiescence of Afghanistan had even suggested the alternatives of Merv being placed under Persian or Afghan control. The distrust of either of these in the absence of their complete submission to the British will and domination led to the dismissal of this idea. Yet Russia had to be held back, her influence had to be counteracted and a ring of dependent, willingly subordinate states had to be created round the Russian empire. These motives together with the fast developing crisis in the Turkish empire would explain the character of the policy and measures which were adopted by the new Conservative Government in England towards Amir Sher Ali involving him in conflict with the British Government.

It may also be stated here that during all these years Amir Sher Ali had been permitted to be in correspondence with Kauffmann and that, as has been mentioned earlier, a number of letters had been exchanged between the two. In Appendix No. 2 to the Correspondence Respecting Central Asia, No. 1

¹ Lord Hamilton to Lord Tenterden, 22 June, 1875, *Central Asia* No. 1 (1878) pp. 43-4

(1878), this correspondence between 1870 and 1873 has been quoted. The letters were forwarded by the Amir to the Viceroy; and though the Kabul Durbar considered the trend of Russian letters objectionable and pregnant with injurious consequences, no Viceroy regarded them as anything other than prompted by the friendliness of Russia and in consonance with her obligation not to interfere in the affairs of Afghanistan.¹ In subsequent years also such letters were exchanged and brought by native envoys who were received politely by the Amir. All these letters, even as late as 1876, were shown to the Indian Agent at Kabul and their substance or text communicated to the Government of India. All these letters along with the Kabul Diaries were forwarded to the Secretary of State for India and the British Foreign Office, but it appears no objection was taken by them either to the language of these or to the procedure adopted as such. Only once did Lord Northbrook's Government express misgivings in regard to a word, "the request," in the letter of the officiating Governor-General of Turkistan in which he had stated that Kauffmann would place the Amir's "request" before the Czar; and the British Ambassador at St. Petersburg was asked to find out exactly what this request was.² Otherwise, this correspondence was authorised by the Government of India and was not construed in any manner as being clandestine or adverse to the wishes and interests of the British Government. Moreover, till the Turkish crisis intervened in 1875 and Merv was believed to be threatened, the Governments of India and England had no occasion to assume that the Russian conduct towards Afghanistan was other than in absolute conformity with the undertakings given. The Amir's behaviour was also unexceptionable; it had been in accordance with the wishes of the Viceroy; he had abstained from interference with his neighbours beyond the Oxus, had abided by all agreements entered into by the British Government on his behalf, even without his prior consent, and had resented and feared Russian encroachments.

It is in this setting that we have to examine the instructions of Lord Salisbury to the Government of India on 22nd January,

1 See Letters and Kabul Diary. In this connection Aitchison's letter to Griffin of 30 Sept., 1872 is characteristic of the policy of the Govt. of India: "Should H. H. the Amir allude to these letters, and manifest the apprehensions which his courtiers entertain, the Agent should be instructed to state that the Viceroy and Governor-General-in-Council sees in them no grounds whatever for apprehension, but rather additional reason for believing that the Russian authorities desire to maintain none of the relations but those of amity with the Govt. of Afghanistan."

2 Despatch to Secretary of State, No. 15, 1 May, 1874, and enclosure 1 Letter of Kolpakofski to Amir, 20 Dec., 1873.

1875, that he should take measures with all expedition "for procuring the assent of the Ameer to the establishment of a British Agency at Herat." This might be followed by one at Kandahar, though Kabul was not then envisaged. The reason given for this novel demand was the "comparative scantiness of the information which it is in your Excellency's power to supply." The Indian Agent at Kabul was considered to be partial to the Amir and not in "a condition to furnish you with any facts which it is not the Ameer's wish that you should receive." The Kabul Diaries were characterised as obviously "meagre" and of doubtful "fidelity." And because Her Majesty's Government desired "more exact and constant information" about "the disposition of the people in various parts of Afghanistan, the designs and intrigues of its chiefs, the movement of nomad tribes upon its frontier, the influence which foreign powers may possibly be exerting within and without its borders" as well as other details "that the military authorities should possess," the Secretary of State desired an English Agent to be stationed in that kingdom as the Indian Agent was not expected to furnish all these details.¹ This was a departure from the past practice and pledges given by the British Government, and incompatible with the friendliness then existing between the Afghan and British Governments. Hence the Government of Lord Northbrook demurred.²

We have earlier analysed the situation of the Amir and his general feelings towards the British Government which were not other than of friendliness and faith. Lord Northbrook, who had considerable knowledge of Afghanistan and its ruler, made a frank and correct analysis of the Amir's attitude and the possible reactions which the suggestion made by Salisbury would have on him. The Viceroy fully appreciated the position of Amir Sher Ali, "subject as he is to the risk of a revolution at home and apprehensive of attack from abroad," and made due allowance for his dissatisfaction and disappointment.³ However, the Viceroy and his Council believed that the Amir "understands that the British Government have no designs of encroaching upon Afghanistan, that he feels that the interests of British India and his own are identical, that he is seriously alarmed at the progress of Russia, and that his main reliance is placed upon British support." Lord Northbrook did not

1 Despatch from Secretary of State to the Governor-General, Secret, No. 2, 22 Jan., 1875, Afghan Correspondence, 1878, p. 128.

2 Despatch to Secretary of State, No. 19, 7 June, 1875.

3 Despatch to Secretary of State, 7 June, 1875, para 33.

disguise the fact that the Amir's language after the Simla Conference was "far from satisfactory." But he attributed it "either to his impression that we were so anxious for his support that by assuming an attitude of dissatisfaction he might obtain further assistance from us; or to his disappointment that we did not give him the distinct pledge he asked that the British Government would protect him under all circumstances against external attack, coupled perhaps with his discontent at the result of the Seistan arbitration."¹ This might not, of course, be construed as an attitude of hostility engendered by the influence of a foreign power hostile to the British. It definitely underlined the Amir's dependence on the British and his mortification at not getting enough or all that he desired to strengthen the bonds of amity between the two. Lord Northbrook also sought support for this view from the statement of Sir Richard Pollock, who knew Nur Muhammad Shah and Afghanistan well, "that no unfavourable change whatever had occurred in the disposition of His Highness, that he leaned as much as ever on the British Government, and that he (Sir Richard Pollock) could find no symptoms whatever of an inclination on the part of the Ameer, or on the part of those about him, to seek assistance from any other quarter. On the contrary, it would appear that he looks with increasing distrust and suspicion on his northern neighbours, while Persia, his only other neighbour worth writing of, is his natural enemy."² The Viceroy had confirmation of this view from information available from other sources and discounted the rumours of "communications unknown to the British Government" "having passed between the Ameer and Russian officers, or that Russian Agents have penetrated Afghanistan." The Government of India, further, had no reason to feel that since the Ambala Conference the Amir had ever "shown any disposition to neglect our advice as to the external relations of Afghanistan. He accepted fully, although with great reluctance, the decision of the British Government in the Seistan arbitration, and we have no reason to doubt that he intends loyally to abide by it." On this basis, Lord Northbrook believed that "the main objects of the policy" advocated by the previous Viceroys, Canning, Lawrence and Mayo, "are secured." He further added "We have established friendly relations with Afghanistan; that country is stronger than it has ever been since the days of Dost Mahomed, and our influence is sufficient to prevent the Ameer from aggression

1 Despatch to Secretary of State, 7 June, 1875.

2 Ibid., para. 34.

upon his neighbours.”¹

The Government of India in 1875 did not consider any departure from that policy as either desirable or opportune, and exhorted Her Majesty's Government not to countenance any such move. They concluded their despatch thus: “We attach great importance to the moral and material advantages which are derived from maintaining friendly relations with Afghanistan; and we would impress upon Her Majesty's Government our conviction that such relations will best be secured by a steady adherence to the patient and conciliatory policy which has been pursued by the Government of India for many years towards Afghanistan; and by making every reasonable allowance for the difficulties of the Ameer, even if he should be reluctant to accede to the views which we may entertain as to the measures which may be advisable equally for his own interests and for those of British India.”²

This view of the friendly attitude of the Amir is confirmed in Lord Northbrook's despatch of 28th January, 1876, when he wrote, “we have no reason to believe that he (Ameer) has any desire to prefer the friendship of other powers.”³ Subsequently also in unprejudiced quarters there was no doubt about the sincerity of the Amir to adhere to British friendship and not to entertain any desire of having any dealings with Russia, or any other power. Nawab Ata Muhammad Khan, the Indian Agent in Kabul, is reported to have told Sir Lewis Pelly and others, on 7th October, 1876, that “no communications passed between the Courts of Teheran and Cabul; that the Ameer regards the Agents from Russia as sources of embarrassment.”⁴ From the conversations of the Indian Agent at Kabul with the Viceroy or the Foreign Secretary at Simla, hardly can an impression arise that the Amir was unfriendly to the British or that he could by any means be considered to be in league with Russia or even amenable to that influence. All that can be gathered is that certain incidents or acts committed by the Government of India had caused dissatisfaction to him, and that he desired more definite agreements to make the friendship between the two Governments binding. This inference is further reinforced by the trend of discussions early in 1877 at Peshawar between Nur Muhammad Shah and Sir Lewis Pelly, the British representa-

1 Northbrook's despatch No. 19, 7 June, 1875, paras. 33-36, *Afghan Correspondence*, p. 134

2 Despatch, 7 June, 1875, para. 39, *ibid.*, p. 135

3 Despatch No. 36, 28 January, 1876, *ibid.*, p. 15^c

4 Enclosure 18 in No. 36, *ibid.*, p. 181

tive.¹ The Amir desired British friendship and support and had no trust in Russia or Persia; however, he was apprehensive of the trend of developments in Central Asia and was not content with general assurances, and was not at the same time prepared to forgo his right to prevent British officers from being established in his kingdom or interfering in his internal affairs.

We have also pointed earlier to the extreme aversion of the Amir to the stationing of British agents in his country and to the solemn undertakings given to him by the successive Viceroys against such an eventuality. Also, Amir Sher Ali's refusal to permit British officers in his kingdom was not deemed to be inconsistent with his loyalty as a friend. But in 1875, the new Government in England insisted on this course and took its stand on the supposed "readiness" of the Amir to "permit the presence of an Agent at Herat" and suggested "that, if his intentions are still loyal, he will make no serious difficulty now."² This implied that refusal to entertain a British agent would be construed as an act of disloyalty and would be deemed to be incompatible with friendly relations between the two states. The main reason given, as has been mentioned earlier, was the paucity of information furnished by the Indian Agent at Kabul; the occasion was the probability of a Russian threat to Merv and the Turkoman territory which required British officers on the Afghan frontier to watch and report the developments beyond. Gradually opinion crystallised that the presence of British agents in Afghanistan was identical with the security of British interests, and that the refusal of the Amir was a clear sign of his hostility to the British Government and his drift into the hostile camp of Russia. An attempt will now be made to discuss the fast developing events and to show how this view was erroneous, and how the continuous and rapidly growing insistence on this demand caused misunderstandings and tension which culminated in an unnecessary war.

A very reasoned and factual refutation of Lord Salisbury's demand for stationing a British agent at Herat was submitted by the Government of India, which not only denied the basis of that request but also pointed out the injury which it would bring to the interests of the British Indian empire. Adverting to the plea that the Indian Agent did not supply either adequate or important information, the Government of India held the view that "making due allowance for the position of our Agent at Cabul, the information which he supplies is

¹ Enclosure 18 in No. 36, pp. 196-214.

² Despatch from Secretary of State, 22 Jan., 1875.

fairly full and accurate" though it might not always be sufficient. He had to be cautious and prudent, but there was no truth in the allegation that he gave only such information as the Amir desired him to furnish. The Government of India also found no substance in the claim that the Amir had at any time agreed to such postings in his country, and conclusively stated that "Looking to all the circumstances of the case, the absence of any formal record of the alleged admission, its entirely private and confidential nature, and the uncertainty as to its scope and intention, we consider that we should not be justified in founding any representation to the Ameer regarding the mission of a British Agent to Herat upon the assumption that he had, when at Umballa, expressed his willingness to agree to such an arrangement, nor do we think that, in forming an opinion upon the Ameer's reception of any such proposal at the present time, we could fairly attach any importance to the communications which were made to Captain Grey at Umballa in 1869. Of any previous or subsequent acceptance of such a proposal by the Ameer we can find no trace."¹ Next, the Government of India considered the question whether "it would be wise and politic to urge upon him the establishment of a British Agency at Herat or Candahar," and their considered judgement was "that the present time and circumstances are unsuitable for taking the initiative in this matter." The Government of India was not hostile to the proposal as such or was oblivious of the advantages which would accrue. But the measure might be useful only if it had the "full confidence of the Ameer," and the arrangement had been made with the "cordial consent of the Ameer." For this there was no hope as the Amir would either refuse the request or accept it "with great reluctance," and in both such eventualities the measure would be useless and fraught with injurious consequences. Hence their recommendation was "that no immediate pressure be put upon the Ameer, or particular anxiety be shown by us upon the subject, but that the advantage be taken of the first favourable opportunity that his own action or other circumstances may present for the purpose of sounding his disposition and of representing to him the benefit which would be derived by Afghanistan from the proposed arrangement." One such opportunity would be when Russia had assumed authority over the whole Turkoman country; and then by giving "additional and more specific assurances to the Ruler of Afghanistan that we are prepared to assist him to defend

¹ Despatch to Secretary of State, 7 June, 1875.

Afghanistan against attack from without "and entering into a Treaty engagement," his consent for a British agent at Herat might be secured.¹

The rejoinder of the Secretary of State to this most reasonable and modest protest by the Government of India is a fine fabric composed of misrepresentations, and insinuations, and outlined the procedure for prevailing upon the Amir to agree to the wishes of the British Government. It was pointed out that "the recent advances of Russia, which have placed her outermost posts in some places almost on the frontier of Afghanistan, in others upon roads which lead to it by easy and well supplied marches" had made the matter one of extreme importance. Dangers were indicated from the proximity of Russia which might take one of these alternative forms; Russian mastery over the Amir which would detach him from English interests and leave to Russia the choice of the moment for penetrating to any portion of his country; disturbing the Amir's hold over his kingdom by internal disorder and tampering with the loyalty of his chiefs, or if either of these might not succeed by seeking a pretext for exacting a territorial penalty consequent on a collision between Russian and Afghan frontier forces. Lord Salisbury did not agree to the Government of India's estimate of the Amir's loyalty. About the second and third alternatives he had no doubts and wrote, "Even if the Ameer's loyalty could be counted on for an indefinite period, a field would still be left for foreign intrigue, dangerous alike to the Ameer's power and to the interests of Great Britain." Recent military measures in Maimna were misrepresented, and it was emphasised that the possibility of "a dominant Russian influence in Afghanistan would be materially diminished, if not wholly neutralized, by the presence of a British officer in that country." Lord Salisbury did not also accept the plea of Lord Northbrook's Government that the occupation of Merv would be the right moment for taking the initiative, and stressed that then "the time would possibly have passed by when representations to the Ameer could be made with any useful result; for the influence of your Government at Cabul, already enfeebled, would, for such a purpose, have in a great measure disappeared." Then the Amir would look for favour with the stronger. Lord Salisbury had no patience with the view that a refusal by the Amir would lead to loss of prestige. On the contrary be felt that it would expose the already enfeebled British influence there and would reveal the hostile intentions of the

1 Despatch to Secretary of State, 7 June, 1875.

Amir. Hence the suggestion was made for a temporary mission which might be the precursor of a permanent one.¹

The position at the close of 1875 was that, influenced by Russian policy in Central Asia and in view of the developments in the Near East, Her Majesty's Government had been led by a growing opinion in England among some retired British-Indian officers to reverse the existing policy in regard to the stationing of British Residents or agents in Afghanistan without the willing acquiescence of the Amir and to press the reception of a British mission in his country. The Government of India had been opposed to such a course unless it was made with the active consent of the Amir, and had pointed out the consequences of such a step. The Secretary of State had brusquely brushed aside their arguments and insisted on the adoption of the new policy, essentially on the ground of the supposed willingness of the Amir to have British officers in his country in 1869, and the advantages which would accrue to him by having British agents at his frontiers who would give timely information to the British Government of all adverse moves beyond them. Lord Northbrook knew the Amir's determined opposition to such a measure and realised the danger involved, unless the proposal was accompanied by substantial gains to him. Most emphatically he pointed out that "there was an entire concurrence of opinion among all those who could be supposed to have the means of forming a correct judgement of the sentiments of the Ameer that he is most unwilling to receive British officers as residents in Afghanistan, that his reluctance is consistent with his loyal adherence to the interests of the British Government." He called it "a grave error" and a "deviation from the patient and conciliatory policy which had hitherto guided our relations with Afghanistan." The Viceroy also objected to the procedure dictated by the Secretary of State, and put forth the view that the Amir should be "frankly and fully" informed of "the real purpose of the mission" and be invited "to enter cordially into those closer relations with the British Government which the mission is to endeavour to establish." He warned that "the Ameer is not likely to welcome any mission we may send unless its objects are fully and clearly explained to him beforehand."² Thus the stratagem proposed by Lord Salisbury that a temporary mission be sent on some petty excuse and there discuss the question of stationing a British agent at Herat was not, in the view of the Viceroy, a useful device. He also sug-

1 Salisbury's Despatch, 19 Nov., 1875, *Afghan Correspondence*, pp. 147-49

2 Despatch to Secretary of State, 28 Jan., 1876, para. 7,

gested, as an alternative, that the Amir be informed "that the condition of affairs in Central Asia makes it expedient that the relations between the British Government and Afghanistan should be placed on a more definite footing than at present; that, while we have no proposals to make deviating in any way from the policy, which has hitherto guided and will continue to guide us, of complete abstention from interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, we are desirous of arriving at a clearer understanding as to the arrangements necessary for obtaining full information of events on and beyond the frontiers of Afghanistan so that the British Government may be able to avert by a timely exercise of friendly influence any danger which may threaten the integrity of Afghanistan; and that for this purpose direct personal conference with His Highness is necessary." Such a conference may be held either by the Amir meeting the Viceroy at Peshawar or the Amir receiving a mission in his country. These alternatives were put forth to gain the "confidence of the Amir and prevent any deceitful approach to him for a purpose which he most detested."¹

Lord Northbrook, in turn, desired to know what Her Majesty's Government's policy would be in regard to two likely questions which the Amir would naturally raise "if he entertains the proposal that British Residents should be placed at Herat and Candahar." These questions will be : "1st. Whether Her Majesty's Government are prepared to give unconditional assurances of their determination to protect the territories of Afghanistan against any external attack. 2nd. If the Ameer should apply for assistance for the purpose of fortifying Herat and improving his army, to what extent his demands should be complied with." It was pointed out that in 1873 the Amir was not satisfied with anything, "short of a full and unconditional promise of protection against foreign attack." But the Government of India, neither then nor at the beginning of 1876, had been authorised "to give to the Ameer any such unconditional guarantee." Lord Northbrook, however, had "grave objections against binding the British Government by such an obligation." The Viceroy stated that the Amir would desire "large pecuniary assistance in aid of the protection of Afghanistan," but he deemed it "impolitic" to spend large sums of money for strengthening the position of that country in view of the uncertainty of the purpose for which such fortifications were to be employed. Lastly, he referred to the danger from Russia which was pointed out by Lord Salisbury, and

¹ Despatch to Secretary of State, 26 Jan., 1876. Afghan Correspondence, pp. 149-155

stated that till then the Amir had been fed on the assurances that the Anglo-Russian agreement had removed all fear of aggression, that the fixing of the boundaries had eliminated "apprehension of danger"; hence any retraction from that limit would seriously hamper his confidence and would create suspicions about the Russian agreement in his mind. Lord Northbrook emphasised the improbability of the Amir agreeing to the proposal and dilated on the evil which would result from imposing British Residents on an unwilling Amir.¹ This was his last protest, for soon after he relinquished the office rather than execute a policy which he considered injurious to his country.

On a review of the course of events so far, it must be mentioned that the absence of British agents in Afghanistan had not occasioned harm; rather it had been an important factor in winning the confidence of the Amir and ensuring friendly relations. The Amir was not content with the vagueness of undertakings of assistance given by the Government of India and desired more binding agreements, based on a definite treaty, for his protection both against external attack and internal disorder, which the Government of India was not competent to give. The Amir was also absolutely averse to the stationing of British Residents in his kingdom, and it is doubtful if any pecuniary advantages or other concessions might have removed his suspicions and led him to accept a measure which he regarded subversive to his sovereignty. The desire of Lord Salisbury to secure the right to have agents at Herat and Kandahar was not the product of any necessity which the Amir might appreciate, but was the result of *a priori* considerations incommensurate with the exigencies of the situation, and likely to lead to doubts about the sincerity and honesty of the British Government. Lord Northbrook was not only opposed to this serious departure from the recognised policy, but was also against the manner of approach which was both clandestine and untruthful. If Lord Salisbury had been prepared to proceed gradually and cautiously, basing every step in this direction on a clear appreciation of the Russian danger to Afghanistan and had corresponded the demand with adequate help and assurances of aid defined in a treaty, the object would have been gained without creating a crisis in the Indo-Afghan relations. But the haste with which this measure was being pushed and the brusqueness of the approach by Lord Northbrook's successor, as well as the insistence associated with it, helped to create the impression that some sinister motive injurious to Afghan independence was

1 Despatch to Secretary of State, 26 Jan., 1876.

there. This made its acceptance by the Amir a difficult task. We will now briefly review the steps taken by the British and Indian Governments to secure their object.

Lord Northbrook was succeeded by Lord Lytton who was given definite instructions before his departure from England and was thus bound to follow a policy which, owing to his enthusiasm for it, he executed with great alacrity.¹ By reason of the importance of this document on the course of future events, we will quote from these instructions extensively to show the policy which the new Government was prepared to implement. The Secretary of State started by referring to the close connection between the stability of British power in India and the relations with the "Trans-frontier States" which, however, were not at the time considered to be satisfactory. And he wrote, "The increasing weakness and uncertainty of British influence in Afghanistan constitutes a prospective peril to British interests," a premise which was not absolutely correct. He also dilated on "the deplorable interruption" of this influence in Kalat which was likely to have evil effects on British control over the trans-Indus tribes. The steps already "commended to the consideration" of the Government of India for remedying this state of affairs were then recounted, and these referred to the "arrangements for promoting unity of purpose and consistency of conduct in the administration of the Sindh frontier," as well as to the proposal relating to the despatch of a temporary mission to Kabul "furnished with such instructions as may, perhaps, enable it to overcome the Ameer's apparent reluctance to the establishment of permanent British Agencies in Afghanistan, by convincing His Highness that the Government of India is not coldly indifferent to the fears he has frequently urged upon its attention; that it is willing to afford him material support in the defence of his territories from any actual and unprovoked external aggression, but that it cannot practically avert or provide for such a contingency without timely and unrestricted permission to place its own Agents in those parts of his dominions whence they may best watch the course of events." The Government of India had long been assuring the Amir of their intimate concern in his security and had not hesitated to render timely aid, but without the all-important condition of placing their agents in his country. Hence for its general vagueness the concession mentioned in this document did not materially differ from the earlier more cordial assurances given without any overriding conditions, limitations or provisos which

¹ Instructions contained in letter dated 28 Feb., 1876. Afghan Correspondence, 1878, pp. 156-159

practically negated the entire course of Indo-Afghan friendship.

The Secretary of State then suggested an excuse for the mission, which was to be the announcement of the assumption of Viceroyalty by Lord Lytton and of the Imperial title by the Queen of England. He also advised the new Viceroy as to the route which the British envoy should follow; and here the motive was to allow him to visit both Kalat and Afghanistan and have a clear view of the country and people in the western portions of the Amir's territories, an object of immense implications in the context of later developments. Next was expatiated the purpose of the visit which was expressed thus: "To invite the confidence of the Ameer will be the primary purpose of your Agent. To secure that confidence must be the ultimate object of your Government. But to invite confidence is to authorise the frank utterance of hopes which it may be impossible to satisfy, and fears which it may be dangerous to confirm. Whether these hopes and fears be reasonable or the reverse, their open avowal is, in the opinion of Her Majesty's Government, preferable to their concealment." The Amir had not, it seems, hesitated to avow his hopes and fears earlier too; only the British Government had not deemed it appropriate to accept them or to correlate their policy to the needs and aspirations of Amir Sher Ali. We may now examine in what manner Lord Salisbury hoped to win his confidence.

The Secretary of State first reiterated the point that "the maintenance in Afghanistan of a strong and friendly power has at all times been the object of British policy," and that "the attainment of this object" should be considered in the light of "the recent and rapid advance of the Russian arms in Central Asia towards the northern frontiers of British India." His conclusion was that "Her Majesty's Government cannot view with complete indifference the probable influence of that situation upon the uncertain character of an Oriental Chief whose ill-defined dominions are thus brought, within a steadily narrowing circle, between the conflicting pressures of two great military empires, one of which expostulates and remains passive, whilst the other apologises and continues to move forward." Then he dilated on the likely influence of Russophobia in Anglo-Indian circles on the mind of Amir Sher Ali, and wrote that if all that has been written in the press on the subject should be taken by the Amir as "a revelation of the mind of the English Government," then there "must have long been accumulating in his mind impressions unfavourable to its confidence in British power." And further expressed, "Whether the passivity of that

power, in presence of a situation thus officially discussed with disquietude, be attributed by the Amir to connivance with the political designs, or fear of the military force, of his Russian neighbours—the inference, although erroneous is in either case prejudicial to our influence in Afghanistan.” It is difficult to agree wholly with the reality of this conclusion for it was more the result of imaginary fears and suspicion of the motives of the Amir, and was exploited for making an argument to prevail upon him a course which alone had become the chief object of the British Government. The Secretary of State next referred to the declarations to the Russian Government about British policy in Afghanistan and most specifically repudiated any claim by Russia to send her envoys to Afghanistan, a plea which had been put forward by the Amir in refuting the demand for having a British agent in his kingdom.

The instructions then bear on the mode of the envoy's conduct towards the Amir and state, “To demands which you have no intention of conceding your Agent will oppose a frank and firm refusal. You will instruct him to prevent such demands from becoming subjects of discussion. Others which, under certain conditions, you may be willing to entertain, he will undertake to refer to your Government, with such favourable assurances as may induce the Ameer to recognize the advantage of facilitating, by compliance with your wishes, the fulfilment of his own. If the language and demeanour of the Ameer be such as to promise no satisfactory result of the negotiations thus opened, His Highness should be distinctly reminded that he is isolating himself, at his own peril, from the friendship and protection it is his interest to seek and deserve.” After thus instructing about the general purpose of the mission, the route which the envoy would take, the attitude which he had to adopt towards any reference to the Russian agents, and the threat which he was to administer to the Amir in case his demeanour was not yielding to the British demands, the Secretary of State adverted to the probable return which the Amir might seek for his assent to the British demand and the extent to which it could be conceded. All that the Amir would ask for were firstly, a “fixed and augmented subsidy,” secondly, “a more decided recognition than has yet been accorded by the Government of India to the order of succession established by him in favour of his younger son, Abdulla Jan,” and lastly, “an explicit pledge, by Treaty or otherwise, of material support in case of foreign aggression.” Her Majesty's Government outlined their policy towards all these three, which substantially did not differ from the course pursued so far.

In respect of the first, a fixed subsidy, it was stated that the Government of India might "probably deem it inexpedient to commit" itself "to any permanent pecuniary obligation," but that circumstances might require the grant of increased amounts from time to time; hence the discretion of the Governor-General in Council was to be left free as regards the occasions and the amount of pecuniary assistance. The policy suggested as regards the second was ingenuous. After referring to Lord Mayo's declaration in 1869 of viewing with displeasure all attempts by the Amir's rivals to disturb his power or the succession established by him, and adverting to "the conflicting interpretations of an ambiguous formula" which occasioned mutual disappointment, the Secretary of State outlined his policy in the following words:

"Her Majesty's Government do not desire to renounce their traditional policy of abstention from all unnecessary interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. But the frank recognition of a *de facto* order in the succession established by a *de facto* Government to the throne of a foreign state does not, in their opinion, imply or necessitate any intervention in the internal affairs of that State." In this connection he also desired the Viceroy to bring about a reconciliation between the Amir and Abdur Rahman Khan, which would lead to increased solidarity of the succession defined by Amir Sher Ali.

On the third, that of giving a definite assurance to the Amir of material support in the event of external aggression, the policy now defined was no less ambiguous, and was not intended to differ from the declarations made earlier. Stating that as the British Government in its own interest would be impelled to assist the Amir in repelling an invasion of his territory, and also as Lord Northbrook's personal assurances to his envoy had not satisfied Amir Sher Ali, Lord Salisbury said that "Her Majesty's Government are, therefore, prepared to sanction and support any more definite declaration which may, in your judgement, secure to their unaltered policy the advantages of which it has been hitherto deprived by an apparent doubt of its sincerity. But they must reserve to themselves entire freedom of judgement as to the character of circumstances involving the obligation of material support to the Ameer, and it must be distinctly understood that only in some clear case of unprovoked aggression would such an obligation arise." But the price to be paid by the Amir for this was that he should agree to "afford them every reasonable facility for such precautionary measures as they may deem requisite. These precautionary measures by no means involve the establishment of British garrisons in any part of Afghanistan, nor do Her Majesty's Government entertain the

slightest desire to quarter British soldiers upon Afghan soil; but they must have, for their own Agents, undisputed access to its frontier positions. They must also have adequate means of confidentially conferring with the Ameer upon all matters as to which the proposed declaration would recognize a community of interests. They must be entitled to expect becoming attention to their friendly counsels; and the Amir must be made to understand that, subject to all fair allowance for the condition of the country, and the character of the population, territories ultimately dependent upon British power for their defence must not be closed to those of the Queen's officers or subjects who may be duly authorised to enter them." The Amir's consent was also to be secured for the establishment of a telegraph line to Kabul, and the permanent presence of an Afghan agent at the Viceregal Court for facility of confidential relations with His Highness. "Subject to these general conditions, Her Majesty's Government can see no objection to your compliance with any reasonable demand on the part of Sher Ali for more assured support and protection, such as pecuniary assistance, the advice of British officers in the improvement of his military organization, or a promise, not vague, but strictly guarded and clearly circumscribed, of adequate aid against actual and unprovoked attack by any foreign power." An unequivocal promise to the Amir was authorised in the above sense, and the Viceroy's discretion in considering the advantages of a treaty on the basis above indicated "was not fettered." Finally, the Viceroy was advised not to dismiss entirely the contingency of "the irretrievable alienation" of the Amir's "confidence in the sincerity and power" of the British Government, and in case of the confirmation of those fears as the result of the proposed negotiations, he was asked that "no time should be lost in reconsidering, from a new point of view, the policy to be pursued in reference to Afghanistan."¹

The instructions embodied the views of the British Government at the time, and it is difficult to pretend that these were not intimately "connected with the Central Asian question" or had not been influenced by the developments in the Near East. As the Duke of Argyll aptly puts it, "Afghan questions . . . were canvassed and discussed entirely in their 'Mervous' aspects."² The instructions were intended to meet the situation in Afghanistan and to satisfy the Amir to win his confidence for securing far-reaching concessions which the Amir had all along denied. But it will be clear from the above analysis of

1 Letter to Governor-General, 28 Feb., 1876.

2 Argyll II, p. 405.

the contents of this document that the proposals were, in the words of Argyll, "nothing but a series of ambiguities, with a strong under-current of the former tendency to deception."¹ There was virtually no difference in the substance or scope of the promise of support to be made to the Amir now from those given to him earlier, and the old limitations, provisos and equivocations still adorned them. It is difficult to contemplate how these could persuade the Amir to demolish the very basis of Anglo-Afghan friendship by agreeing to the location of British agents in his kingdom. Yet it is what the British Government earnestly desired and strove for, thus creating a crisis wholly inexpedient and unnecessary.

We may now examine the steps taken by Lord Lytton to execute his commission and the manner in which he did it. The Duke of Argyll has rightly remarked that the proposals for support, howsoever ambiguous, could have been explained by Lord Northbrook to the Amir "with perfect openness, in a friendly spirit, and without aggravating the injustice of violated Treaties and broken promises, by the still greater injustice of menaces and threats."² Yet this last was the method adopted by his successor, Lord Lytton, who needed no promptings to convince the Amir "of our power at the expense of giving him the most just reason to distrust both our moderation and our good faith." In the instructions given to him the Amir's "independence was trampled under foot, and the new Viceroy was educated in every sentiment towards him which could inspire a treatment of distrust and of indignity."³ Lord Lytton's brusque, impatient manner of dealing with an Asian chief, an embodiment of courtesy, his obstinate insistence on his object irrespective of the sentiments of the other party, and his threats, misrepresentations and distrust, made dispassionate discussion impossible. It is no wonder then that the crisis instead of closing became deeper, and the new Viceroy found an excuse for making the Amir an enemy and fighting him to achieve an object which was close to his heart for solving the problem of Russia in Central Asia.

On his arrival in India, Lord Lytton lost no time in making an approach to the Amir to receive Sir Lewis Pelly on a temporary mission charged with the ostensible purpose of delivering to Amir Sher Ali "in person a Khureeta," intimating his accession to the Viceroyalty and the assumption of the title of Empress by the Queen of England. The Amir was also informed

1 Argyll, II, p. 392

2 Ibid., p. 393

3 Ibid., pp. 403-404

that the envoy "will be able to discuss with your Highness matters of common interest to the two Governments."¹ This communication naturally occasioned deep thought and profound discussion at the Court of the Amir, who was, in conformity with the entire trend of his policy and in consonance with the pledged word of the British rulers in India, averse to, and unprepared for, the reception of a British envoy in his kingdom. In his reply, the Amir referred to the earlier "political parleys" in Simla and suggested that "at this time, if there be any new parleys for the purpose of refreshing and benefiting . . . Afghanistan entertained in the thoughts, then let it be hinted, so that a confidential Agent of this friend, arriving in that place and being presented with the things concealed in the generous heart of the English Government, should reveal them to the suppliant at the Divine Throne, in order that the matters weighed by a minute and exact investigation may be committed to the pen of affectionate writing."² At the same time the Indian Agent at Kabul informed his Government of the reactions of the Amir and his Court, and expatiated on the reasons which prevented Amir Sher Ali from entertaining this new proposal. It appears that the Kabul Government was afraid of the security of the British agent, both owing to the religious fanaticism of the people and the hostility of certain sections to the Amir who would inflict injury upon the envoy "simply with the idea of an ultimate injury to the special family of the Amir." This was no mere excuse, for the fanaticism of the people might be easily kindled in a country where independence was so highly valued. The Kabul Government was also afraid that the non-acceptance of inconvenient demands would lead to "a breach in the friendship of the two Governments," which the Afghans did not contemplate without alarm. In this connection they dilated on the wisdom of the earlier agreement that no British officers would visit that country, and protested that the proposed visit was not advisable. Another point which was made by them was that such a visit might possibly lead to a demand by Russia for her own agents to come to Afghanistan, which it is evident the Amir and his people most detested. Hence the alternative of deputing his own envoy to learn what the Government of India wished to communicate to the Amir was put forward.³

The reply of the Amir "declining the proposed mission"

¹ Commissioner of Peshawar to Amir of Kabul, 5 May, 1876, *Afghan Correspondence*, p. 174.

² Amir to Commissioner of Peshawar, 22 May, 1876.

³ Agent in Kabul to Commissioner of Peshawar, 22 May, 1876, *Afghan Correspondence*, p. 175.

was misrepresented by Lord Lytton's Government as desiring "no change in his relations with the British Government, which appeared to have been defined by that Government to its own satisfaction at the Simla Conference." The Amir's suggestion to send his own envoy was not approved by the Government of India because firstly, they did not wish to repeat the experiment of the Simla Conference which had been "eminently unsatisfactory to ourselves," secondly, the excuse about the Russian envoy "involved a conscious and significant disregard of the understanding arrived at on his behalf between the British and Russian Governments", and lastly "that in the Ameer's interests as well as our own, it was undesirable to regard as absolutely final an answer which appeared to have been written without due deliberation, and might possibly have been inspired by a very erroneous estimate of the position in which His Highness would find himself placed if we at once proceeded to act upon it."¹ Hence Lytton decided to repeat the request and to exhort the Amir to consider the consequences of his denial. The motive and the attitude of the British Government in pressing a British envoy on the Amir are evident from their chagrin and threat that the British Government, as a consequence, would be obliged "to look upon him henceforth as a prince who had voluntarily isolated his personal interests from its proffered alliance and support."² In their own words, therefore, the Government of India desired "to ascertain promptly the precise nature of his real disposition towards us, and the extent to which we might rely, in case of need, upon his recognition of the favours he had received from us, up to this time, without any corresponding obligations on his part."³ The letter addressed to the Amir by the Commissioner of Peshawar, on 8th July, 1876, was "governed by these considerations," and at the same time Dr. Bellew and many other British officers wrote friendly letters to Amir Sher Ali advising him to submit to the wishes of the Viceroy.⁴ The two communications of that date to the Amir and the Indian Agent at Kabul by the Commissioner of Peshawar are significant as expressions of the sentiments of the new Viceroy towards Amir Sher Ali and as pointers to the breach which was growing between the two Governments.

In the letter to the Amir the Commissioner regretted the former's reluctance "to the reception of this friendly mission,"

1 Despatch to Secy. of State, 10 May, 1877, para 24.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Afghan Correspondence, 1878, pp. 176-80

and blamed his "advisers" of misconceiving "the objects" of the Viceroy and ignoring "the light in which such a refusal might be regarded by the British Government." After referring the Amir to his other letter to the Indian Agent, the Commissioner rejected the Kabul proposal on the ground that "the Viceroy cannot receive an Agent from Your Highness when you have declined to receive his Excellency's trusted friend and Envoy." In conclusion, the temptation "materially to strengthen the bonds of friendship and confidence" and effectual guarantee "against all cause for future anxiety" was held out; but the all-important proviso was still there that "the support of the British Government cannot be effectual unless it is based on reciprocal confidence and a clear recognition of the means requisite for the protection of mutual interests."¹ The most important part of the letter was the last paragraph in which one finds an undisguised reflection of the real purpose and policy of the Viceroy. It was stated that in proposing to send a friendly mission the Viceroy was "actuated by a cordial desire, which it rests with your Highness to reciprocate, for the continuance, on closer terms than heretofore, of amicable relations between the two Governments in view of common interests, more particularly affecting Afghanistan and the personal welfare of your Highness and your dynasty. It will, for this reason, cause the Viceroy sincere regret if your Highness, by hastily rejecting the hand of friendship now frankly held out to you, should render nugatory the friendly intentions of his Excellency, and oblige him to regard Afghanistan as a State which has voluntarily isolated itself from the alliance and support of the British Government."²

The other letter is more explicit and seeks to convey to the Amir through the Indian Agent the balance sheet of loss and gain accruing from his attitude to the British proposal. Brushing aside the reasons previously enumerated by the Agent for the non-reception of the mission as unreasonable and engendered by misapprehensions or "mischievous misrepresentations," the communication was so worded as to persuade the Amir to accept the mission which was being despatched solely for his advantage. It was pointed out that some time had elapsed since interchange of opinions had taken place on the situation and needs of the Amir, who would be afforded by this course "a timely opportunity of making known his views in regard to the interests of Afghanistan under existing circumstances, and His Highness will incur a grave responsibility if he deliberately

1 Commissioner of Peshawar to Amir, 8 July, 1876.

2 Letter to Amir, 8 July, 1876, *Afghan Correspondence*, p. 176

rejects the opportunity thus offered him." The Amir was also apprised of the intention of the Viceroy "to regard the interests of Afghanistan as identical with those of the British Government so long as the Ameer proves himself to be its loyal friend and ally" for the security of whose dominions and dynasty aid would be given as in the past; but it was impossible "for the British Government to maintain this community of interests with the Government of His Highness, or to protect the independence and integrity of his State, under conditions incompatible with the ordinary intercourse between friendly Courts." The Amir was exhorted to weigh all considerations and realize "their grave import," and then if he "should recognize the expediency of learning the true nature of his Excellency's views and dispositions in regard to matters which materially concern the interests of His Highness," the envoy would wait upon him and subsequently the Viceroy and the Amir could meet in Peshawar. The alternative proposal to receive the Amir's envoy was declined "as derogatory to the dignity of the British Government, and otherwise wholly inadequate." And in the end the threat was communicated that "if the Ameer, after deliberately weighing all the considerations now commended to his serious attention, still declines to receive the Viceroy's Envoy, the responsibility of the result will rest entirely on the Government of Afghanistan, which will have thereby isolated itself from the alliance of that Power which is most disposed and best able to befriend it."¹

The tone of these letters is pregnant with menaces and warnings that the refusal to receive a British envoy would involve the cessation of friendly relations between the British and Afghan Governments, and that unequivocal aid to strengthen his rule and protect his country against external aggression was conditional on the location of British agents in that country. The Amir was within his rights, and had taken his stand on the solid ground of the earlier pledges of Lords Lawrence, Mayo and Northbrook, in hesitating to receive a British mission, however temporary, in his kingdom. His alternative proposal was in consonance with the past practice and did not by any means admit of being interpreted as born of hostile intentions and feelings. In the absence of any definite and clearly expressed assurances of aid or the frank recognition of his fears, hopes and aspirations, it was unreasonable to expect that he would forgo a vital right and submit to an unjust and aggressive demand by the Viceroy. Yet the Viceroy, perhaps with pre-determined deliberation, decided to press an inconvenient proposal and, on

¹ Letter to Agent, 8 July, 1876. Afghan Correspondence, pp. 176-7

its refusal, to treat the Amir as an antagonistic alien who must be considered to be outside the pale of British friendship. What the Viceroy really desired is difficult to conjecture. If he was keen to strengthen Afghanistan and retain that state within the orbit of his friendly and protected states as a bulwark against Russian aggression towards India, the mode of his approach and the procedure adopted were ill-conceived and injurious to Indian interests. If, however, he wanted to twist Afghanistan to his will as a mere dependent state and exploit the Central Asian situation to bend the Amir to his dictation, there could not be a more adequate means of hustling war. It is evident that by the middle of 1876, Lord Lytton had set his heart, under the instructions of Her Majesty's Government, on either placing British agents in Afghanistan or breaking that kingdom and converting it into a feudatory state whose frontiers would be identical with those of India. The new policy of forward move up to the Oxus to meet Russia halfway found its full unfoldment; and, unmindful of the consequences, Lord Lytton was prepared to adhere to it obstinately, which by engendering suspicion in Kabul made the situation increasingly worse and brought the war nearer.

The Amir, nevertheless, evinced his goodwill and desire to get clear of the trap which was laid for him by the British Government. After long deliberation, on 3rd September, 1876, he put forth two alternative proposals to smooth the process towards goodwill and amity between the two Governments. While emphasising the wisdom of the course suggested by him earlier, that his envoy should be received by the Viceroy, he now suggested that either the envoy of the British Government and his representative should meet on the frontier "to explain mutually the views and wishes of their respective Governments," or if this course did not find approval, the Indian Agent might be summoned by the Viceroy to "expound the whole state of affairs, and having fully understood the desires and projects of the British Government, should return back to me, and explain them all to me in private, after which I should be the better able to decide what course it is incumbent on me to adopt in the interests of my country."¹

The latter course was acceptable to the Viceroy and Nawab Atta Muhammad Khan was summoned to Simla and had two interviews with him on 7th and 10th October, 1876.² This

¹ Amir to Commissioner of Peshawar, 3 Sept., 1876 Afghan Correspondence, 1878, p. 179.

² For a memorandum of conversation between Atta Muhammad Khan and Viceroy, see Afghan Correspondence, 1878, pp 182-5

conversation is important as giving an insight into the British intentions and the extent to which Lord Lytton was prepared to concede terms to the Amir to secure his consent for British agents in his country. There can be no doubt that the Viceroy was bellicosely inclined and sticking to dignity, and unless the Amir submitted to the demand for British agents, he could not expect aid or even friendliness from the British Government. Prospects of compromise or peaceful settlement were out of the question in the existing temper of Lord Lytton. For the fast deteriorating situation in the Near East was impelling him to seek dominant control over Afghanistan; and here were the germs of war.

It was elicited from Nawab Atta Muhammad that the reasons for the Amir's supposed estrangement and annoyance were the unjust and injurious Seistan arbitration award; British proceedings in Kalat sentimentally believed to be a part of Afghanistan; interference in the matter of Yakub Khan contrary to the pledge given in 1869 of viewing with displeasure all attempts to disturb the Amir's authority; presents to Ibrahim Khan of Wakhan without the Amir's consent or knowledge; the dissatisfaction at the results of Nur Muhammad Shah's visit to Simla and the treatment accorded to him; reference in recent letters to the Amir's advisers; the feeling that British policy towards Afghanistan was governed by their own "self-interest, irrespective of the interests of Afghanistan;" and finally the refusal of the British Government to enter into a treaty alliance which gave the impression that "while we desired to depute Political Agents into Afghanistan, and induce the Ameer to guide his policy by our advice, we were unprepared to bind ourselves to any future course in regard to him."¹ The Amir had, therefore, been "unwilling to bind himself by our wishes, and had consequently declined to accept our proffered subsidy. He looked for something more valuable than money."² The Agent also explained the reasons of the Amir for declining to receive the temporary mission, and these were firstly, lack of faith in its outcome in so far as his interests were concerned, secondly, the danger of public excitement and risk to the person of the envoy, and thirdly, the fear that it might "merge into one of a permanent character and that the Envoy, like our Political Agents at the Courts of the Indian Native States, might become a referee for discontented Afghan subjects; that in any case, the permanent presence of a mission would embarrass His High-

1 Summary of a conversation with Nawab Atta Muhammad Khan held at Simla on 7 Oct., 1876, *Afghan Correspondence*, p. 181

2 Ibid.

ness in his internal administration, causing annoyance to the patriotic party, and raising the hopes of the disaffected.”¹ The Agent also referred to the earlier argument about Russia seeking similar advantage to send her agents, and expatiated on the Amir’s distrust of Russia and fear of her aggressive intentions. He also mentioned that Russian agents visited the country and two of them were at the moment in Kabul, but, at the same time pointed out that they were “men of no consequence, and were not often honoured with interviews by the Ameer.”² It may be added here that no Russian subject had crossed into Afghanistan, all these agents were subjects of Bokhara or natives of Central Asian regions. Nawab Atta Muhammad also admitted that “no communication passed between the Courts of Teheran and Cabul; that the Ameer regards the Agents from Russia as sources of embarrassment,” and that quiet prevailed along the frontiers and there was tranquillity in the country.³ The Agent is further reported to have told Captain Grey that the Amir “would be glad to come to our terms if he were once convinced of our meaning real business, but that we must be clear and open in our communications, as the Afghans have come to suspect a second meaning in all that we utter.” On definite assurances of support, and the preliminary meeting between the British envoy and Nur Muhammad Shah on the frontier, further matters could be smoothed. Further, on being asked what the Amir’s probable demands would be, the Agent stated that he would himself “put forward none, considering it useless to do so, but would wait to know what we proposed.” The specific matters which the Amir and his men had at heart were the same as those desired at the Simla Conference, and were detailed as the following :—

- “1st That no Englishmen should reside in Afghanistan, at any rate at Cabul.
- “2nd The British Government should utterly disclaim connection with Mahomed Yakoob or any other pretender (actual or possible) to the Afghan throne, agreeing to recognize and support only his declared heir.
- “3rd That we should agree to support the Ameer, on demand, with troops and money in all and every case of attack from without. Also, should he call upon us to do so, to aid him in the event of internal disturbance.

1 Summary of conversations, *Afghan Correspondence*, p. 181

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

- “ 4th That we should come to some permanent arrangement regarding subsidy.
- “ 5th That the British Government should refrain from interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan.
- “ 6th That in any engagement entered into, an expression to the following effect be embodied :—“The British Government regards the Ameer's friends and enemies as its own, and the Ameer similarly regards those of the British Government.”
- “ 7th That we should alter the style in which we address the Ameer, according him more dignified titles. He considers himself quite the equal of the Shah of Persia.”¹

It has been necessary to describe in detail the preliminary interview with the Agent, for herein we find a clear indication of the feelings and hopes of the Amir and his attitude towards the British, and as it will enable us to examine in this setting the policy of Lord Lytton, in so far as it was expounded by him in his conversations with Nawab Atta Muhammad for communication to the Amir. It is evident from the above that the Amir resented British interference in his internal affairs and was discontented with the outcome of his previous efforts to gain an equilateral, mutually binding agreement on which he could base the protection of his country against external aggression and internal disturbance. He was keen to secure British aid and had no desire to look for friendship in any other quarter, as he hated Persia and feared and distrusted Russia. But at the same time, he suspected the intentions of the British Government when they insisted on stationing their agents in his kingdom, for he was not prepared to jeopardise his independence by repeating the experience of the Indian States. There was no evidence of any secret or intimate liaison with Russia and as yet there was nothing which might cast the least doubt on the Amir's fidelity for British friendship. The only thing which he most dreaded was the prospect of receiving British envoys in his country, but this was what Lord Lytton and his Government solely desired. The Amir's demands were not contrary to the policy of the Government of India; the difference which estranged the two, however, lay in the nature of their acceptance. The British were keen to keep the agreement sublimely vague whereas the Amir wanted it to be precise, definite and equally binding on both. He could not afford to construct the edifice of his foreign and domestic security on foundations of sand. Yet the British Government was not ready to provide the granite

1 Summary of conversations, *ibid.*

which they always held out before his eyes.

It will be interesting to examine the reactions of Lord Lytton and the views and sentiments which he wanted to communicate to the Amir to smooth away his suspicions and to convince him to forgo a vital safeguard of his freedom. The Viceroy's tone was one of threat and his emphasis was on the fact that the Amir was helpless, weak and faced with serious danger to his security which could be insured only by his submitting unconditionally to the will of the master in Simla. He had "profound compassion" for the "present situation of the Ameer," more so as the latter "very inadequately realised the gravity and imminence of the danger into which he is drifting", and owing to "the practical impossibility of maintaining himself in a position of independence, isolated from the protection or exposed to the mistrust of the British Government,"¹ This was a new language and contrary to the trend of all previous relations which were based on assuring the Amir of his security and minimising dangers, both external and internal. As a buffer, the Amir had been led to believe that in the event of external attack he could always expect aid from India without any return being sought. But now Lord Lytton endeavoured to demolish that complaisance by asserting that such support was conditional on his loyalty, for "the moment we have cause to doubt his sincerity. or *question the practical benefit of his alliance*, our interests will be all the other way, and may greatly augment the dangers with which he is already threatened, both at home and abroad."² The Viceroy would give aid only to those who welcome it, and the aid which Amir Sher Ali was disinclined to accept might be desired by his rivals "from whom he will never be free till he has our assured support."³ In respect of external danger the Viceroy emphasised that "our only interest in maintaining the independence of Afghanistan is to provide for the security of our own frontier. But the moment we cease to regard Afghanistan as a friendly and firmly allied state, what is there to prevent us from providing for the security of our frontier by an understanding with Russia, which might have the effect of wiping Afghanistan out of the map altogether? If the Ameer does not desire to come to a speedy understanding with us, Russia does; and she desires it at his expense."⁴ Here was a confirmation of the Amir's suspicions of the motives of British negotiations with Russia. The

1 Memorandum of conversation, 10 Oct., 1876.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

Viceroy further added that the British Government could "pour an overwhelming force into Afghanistan, either for the protection of the Ameer, or the vindication of its own interests, long before a single Russian soldier could reach Cabul . . . If the Ameer remained our friend, this military power could be spread round him as a ring of iron, and, if he became our enemy, it would break him as a reed." He warned the Amir against attempting "to hold the balance between England and Russia independent of either. His position is rather that of an earthen pipkin between two iron pots." Hence the Amir must depend upon the support of the British, which would not be available unless the Amir permitted their agents to be established on the Afghan frontier, for "it is out of the question that we should be committed to seeing the Ameer through a war with Russia, without being in a position to prevent his becoming involved in such a war." Lytton stressed the necessity of watching these frontiers and exhorted the Amir to accede to the arrangement of British officers being posted at Herat, etc., and to agree to receive "special missions when requisite, if his relations with the British Government are to be maintained at all."¹

This round of threats and expostulations was followed by hope and promise of concessions and rewards, which were however not free from limitations which vitiated their character. Lord Lytton admitted that earlier engagements were vague, but now held out hopes of "concluding arrangements which will make him (Amir) the strongest sovereign that has ever sat on the throne of Kabul."² The Amir was also assured of higher dignities; but all this was to follow the assent to British agents in his country. The concessions offered were similar to the Amir's earlier demands and related to the friends and enemies of either being those of the other, recognition of Abdulla Jan as his successor, a yearly subsidy and assistance in men, money and arms in the "event of unprovoked aggression upon Afghanistan from without." The Viceroy also promised assistance in fortifying Herat and loan of officers to discipline the army if the Amir so desired. The conditions imposed were firstly, that the Amir would refrain from external aggression and decline all communication with Russia, secondly, that British agents would reside at Herat and elsewhere on the frontier, special missions would be received by the Amir and Afghanistan would be "freely opened to Englishmen," thirdly, that arrangements would be

1 Memorandum of conversation, 10 Oct., 1876.

2 Memorandum of conversation

made for free circulation of commerce and for telegraph lines in his country; and lastly, that the Amir's frontiers would be demarcated by a mixed commission of British and Afghan officers.¹ Lord Lytton also desired that an Afghan envoy should stay at his court and he was prepared to take over the custody of Yakub Khan. In the end he suggested that if the Amir agreed to these terms, Nur Muhammad Shah could meet Sir Lewis Pelly on the frontier for further discussion and concluding a definite agreement. But he added, "unless the Amir was prepared to enter into such a Treaty as proposed by his Excellency it would be useless for him to send his Agent to discuss matters further, as no discussion on any other terms can be admitted."²

In the second interview again, the Viceroy reiterated the point that unless the Amir agreed beforehand to the location of British officers upon his frontier and adopted an "attitude of friendship and confidence," the two bases of further negotiations, it would be purposeless for the representatives of the two Governments to meet. He was prepared to recognize Abdullah Jan fully and formally and render all support to him, but the precedent condition was that timely information should be available of the demand for aid, and that would require "establishment of mutual confidence and better means of communication between the two Governments."³ Thus the "concessions" were conditional on the location of British agents, reception of temporary missions and development of communications, without which no firm friendly relations with the Amir were possible. These points were incorporated in an *aide-memoire* which Nawab Atta Muhammad was to convey to Amir Sher Ali frankly and faithfully.⁴ In the letter to the Amir, the Viceroy gave the assurance of meeting his wishes expressed at the Simla Conference but on the reciprocal acceptance of the arrangements desired by the British Government, "in the absence of which" it "could not practically fulfil those obligations."⁵

It will be interesting to note in this connection the complexion which was given by the Government of India to the attitude of the Amir as represented by the Indian Agent, and the terms offered to Amir Sher Ali. Nawab Atta Muhammad's elucidation of the Amir's grievances and the visit of Russian agents was misrepresented as follows: "The Ameer was resent-

1 Memorandum of conversation.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 *Aide Memoire* for the Agent at Kabul, Afghan Correspondence p. 185

5 Viceroy to Amir, 11 Oct., p. 1876, Ibid., p. 186.

ful to the rebuffs met with by his previous representations to the Government of India. . . . He was profoundly mortified by the repeated rejection of his previous requests for a defensive alliance, coupled with our formal recognition of the order of succession as established by him in the person of his youngest son, Abdulla Jan . . . The Ameer was much in want of money, and his people much disaffected by his expedients for obtaining it; that the undoubted reluctance to receive British officers was occasioned, not by fears for their personal safety, but by a dread of their probable popularity and possible intervention on behalf of oppressed or discontented subjects; that the Ameer, confident in the strength of the army our gifts had enabled him to equip, no longer felt his old dread of the power of Russia; that, in accordance with our own exhortations, he had lost no opportunity of improving his relations with the Russian authorities in Central Asia and that . . . permanent diplomatic intercourse was now virtually established by means of a constant succession of special Agents, who held frequent conferences with the Ameer, the subject and result of which were successfully kept secret. In short, the information gradually extracted from our Cabul Agent convinced us that the system on which we had hitherto conducted our relations with Sher Ali had practically resulted not only in the alienation of His Highness from the Power which had unconditionally subsidised and openly protected him; but also in the increased closeness and confidential character of his relations with the only other Power that can ever cause serious danger to our Empire in India . . . Also that the Ameer though disinclined to admit British officers would probably, if the point were pressed, accept such a condition rather than forfeit the advantage of a long-desired alliance with the British Government upon terms certain to strengthen his personal position at home, about which he was chiefly anxious.”¹

It is needless to point out how different this interpretation is from the story as revealed by the documents analysed above. Its contradictions are too apparent. And on this diagnosis the Government of India authorised their Agent to explain to the Amir “the moderate and necessary condition on which the British Government was prepared to sign a Treaty of Alliance, and to accord its formal recognition to his heir-apparent.” The conditions were deemed to be such “as any neighbouring Prince, sincerely desirous of our active friend-

1 Despatch to Secy. of State, 1 May, 1877, paras 26-27. *Afghan Correspondence*, pp. 167-68

ship, might accept with personal cordiality and national benefit.”¹ This subjective mode of approach by the Viceroy, and his effort to intimidate the Amir into compliance with the inconvenient conditions, made it difficult for smooth, peaceful relations to continue long. The Amir, though sullen, had not been unfriendly and looked up wholly to the British Government for amity and support. But the new demand and the insistence with which it was pressed must have alienated him, for he was not prepared to sign the death warrant of his country’s independence and be counted among the scores of feudatory Princes of India. The succeeding events merely deepened distrust and eventually brought the war which the Amir least desired. How far Russian danger was responsible for these developments, it is difficult to judge; one fact is, however, clear that Lord Lytton’s preconceived notions and his ambition to merge Afghanistan into his system of “scientific frontier” were directly the cause of the unnecessary war.

With Nawab Atta Muhammad’s departure the stage had been set for the breach with Amir Sher Ali, and despite the efforts of the latter to stem the tide of hostility, the conflict was fast developing.

1 Despatch to Secretary of State, 10 May, 1877.

CHAPTER XI

THE ARBITRAMENT OF THE SWORD

WE have already mentioned that the measures which had been contemplated towards Afghanistan were occasioned by the danger of Russian aggression on Merv and the Turkoman country which then intervened between the Russian dominions and the north-western boundaries of Afghanistan. General Lomakin's expedition against the Tekke Turkomans, however limited in its character, had created the alarm. Moreover, events in the Balkans also were moving fast and tending rapidly towards the possibility of conflict between the Russian and British empires. The whole trend of Russian imperial expansion and the rumours of their massing troops on the Oxus with the intention of operating against Merv, were important factors influencing the policy of the Government of India, both towards Russia and the neighbouring states like Afghanistan, Kalat, Chitral, Bajaur, Swat, Dir and Kashgar. In one of his Minutes, dated 12th August 1876, Lord Lytton analysed the situation and opined that but for the pacific nature of Emperor Alexander, "the military authorities in Central Asia, animated by military traditions . . . supported by the national sentiment of all, or, at least, the vast majority of their countrymen . . . must inevitably continue to move forward, fast or slow, as circumstances may determine, in directions which will sooner or later bring them, if not into conflict, yet certainly into close contact, with those frontier states which the British Government has hitherto declared and the Russian Government admitted, to be legitimately beyond the sphere of Russian influence."¹ He further stressed the point by stating that these Russian authorities "are agreed that Cabul is the master key to the gates of British India; that the possession of Afghanistan, whether military or political, would give them, if not the command of the Indian Peninsula, at least a most potent purchase over it, and that the political will be, in Russian interests, infinitely preferable to the military possession of Afghanistan."² But he held that Russian attack upon India was not "an imminent probability," and would not occur as long as Russia and

1 F.D.S.P. 1877, Aug., No. 102/106 K. W.

2 Minute, 12 Aug., 1876.

England were at peace in Europe, "but it would doubtless form part of Russian tactics if the British Government was compelled in defence of its interests in Europe, to go to war with the Government of Russia." Such a contingency was not far and this Lord Lytton well knew. Hence his fear that the Russian authorities would take steps "to weaken British and strengthen Russian influence at Cabul, by every means in their power."¹ In this context, he viewed with alarm and distrust the harmless correspondence which had been carried on between Amir Sher Ali and Kaufmann since 1870, with the express consent of the Government of India and within the knowledge of the two Imperial Governments.

Lord Lytton now desired to block this avenue of future danger and simultaneously with his action to intimidate, cajole or persuade the Amir to accept British agents on the frontiers of his kingdom, he was keen for a *démarche* at St. Petersburg to prevent Kaufmann from having any contact with the Amir. Objection was taken to a letter in which Kaufmann had sent information of his Khokand expedition and recognition of Abdullah Jan to the Amir, and Lord Lytton wrote in that connection : "I am most reluctantly led to the conclusion that our previous toleration of a correspondence, in which the Russian General, not even confining his remarks to the foreign interests of Afghanistan, has already made very significant reference to the internal affairs of that country, in a sense decidedly opposed to the language then held towards the Ameer by the Government of India, makes it now very difficult for us to remonstrate with adequate effect against proceedings which I cannot but regard as a gross violation of the assurances solemnly given by Prince Gortchakoff."² Sir William Muir was more positive about such a remonstrance and desired that "no time should be lost in appealing to Russia against the continuance of this direct communication." For, he wrote, "things have so completely changed within the last few years that there should be no difficulty in making our case plain and reasonable to Russia. The recent advance on Khokand, following on the occupation of Samarkand, and the reduction of Bokhara and Khiva to Russian subordination, has no doubt made Afghanistan nervous in respect of the attitude of Russia. And communications of the character of General Kaufmann's letter cannot fail to be viewed as indicative of a political attitude quite inconsistent with the repeated assurances of Russia that Afghanistan is altogether beyond the

1 Minute, 12 Aug., 1876, F.D.S.P. 1817 Aug., 102/106 K.W.

2 Ibid.

sphere of its action.”¹ It was felt that it was a matter “not merely of local or Indian, but of Imperial, interest;” hence it was necessary to invoke diplomatic action by the British Cabinet, for as Clarke wrote “on its action alone, especially at this possibly supreme moment in the conduct of passing events, must we rely as to the future of England in India and the East.”² A despatch was thereupon addressed to the Secretary of State on 18th September, 1876.³

In this despatch the Government of India exaggerated the extent of correspondence between the Russian Governor-General and the Amir of Kabul and depended on unfounded rumours for their alarm at the frequency of the visits of Russian native agents and the intimacy of their approach to the Amir. It was represented to Lord Salisbury that “these communications are not merely complimentary expressions of friendly sentiment, but have reference to matters of importance, affecting, not only the foreign interests, but even the internal affairs of Afghanistan; that they tend to increase in frequency; that latterly they have, on more than one occasion, been transmitted by a special Agent.” Hence Her Majesty’s Government was requested to call the attention of the Russian Government to this breach of their assurances that Afghanistan was “entirely beyond the sphere of Russian influence,” and to take steps to prevent the continuance of such proceedings. Lytton’s Government read much more in this correspondence than was perhaps ever imagined by its originator, for they thought it involved “the important question whether the influence of England is to be superseded and replaced by that of Russia at the Court of the Ameer.”

It will be interesting to note that neither in the matter of the secret reception of the Russian agents nor in the clandestine nature of the correspondence, which were insinuated in the Government of India’s despatch, was there any semblance of truth. We know from the Indian Agent at Kabul that the so-called Russian agents, believed to be charged with important diplomatic messages, were mere emissaries from Bokhara whose visits caused embarrassment to the Amir and who seldom possessed the status for gaining his confidence. As regards the letters, we know that every letter was generally opened in the presence of Indian Agent and its contents communicated to the Government of India. Nur Muhammad Shah had no hesitation in protesting against the insinuation

1 Minute by Sir William Muir, 15 Aug., 1876, F.D.S.P. 1877 Aug., 102/106.

2 Minute by A. Clarke, 31 Aug., 1876, Ibid.

3 Despatch No. 41, Secret, 18 Sept, 1876, Ibid.

at Peshawar, and judged from the corroboration by Nawab Atta Muhammad Khan and the contents of these letters as reported to the Parliament, one would be tempted to opine that unnecessary alarm was raised by Lord Lytton's making a mountain of a mole hill, and that this step was conceived with the ulterior motive of completely isolating the Amir and pressing him into submission to his will.

The British Government protested to the Russian Foreign Office not on the correspondence, which perhaps they did not consider to be contrary to the diplomatic understanding, but against the continuance of the Russian agent in Kabul, "for the object of endeavouring to induce Sher Ali to sign an offensive and defensive alliance with the Russian Government, as well as a Treaty of Commerce."¹ This gave a new complexion to the whole question, and the Russian Government had no difficulty in exploding the myth and counter-charging the British Government with military action in the neighbouring states of Swat and Bajaur and of making preparations in Herat for an eventual swoop on Merv.² Kaufmann cleared his conduct to his Government by stating that "since entering on my duties as Governor-General of Turkestan, my relations with Shere Ali Khan have been limited to interchanges of civility, and that I have never sent to Cabul either Agents or even a single Djigitte. My letters have always been sent, once or twice a year, through the Ameer of Bokhara, who forwarded them to Cabul, or by a Djigitte of Samarcand addressed to the Chief of Balkh, who sent them on to the Ameer of Afghanistan. These communications had never any other character than one of pure courtesy."³ To the charge about the agent negotiating a treaty, M. de Giers replied "that there was no question of General Kaufmann entering into political communications with the Ameer of Afghanistan, nor was there the remotest idea of any treaty engagements. The Agent was simply charged to deliver a letter of courtesy from General Kaufmann to the Ameer, which was a usual custom on his resuming the duties of his post, and as the Governor-General of a neighbouring State."⁴ To the later protest regarding Kaufmann's letters to the Amir on the subject of the Khokand expedition and his return from St. Petersburg (Lord Loftus had not presumably communicated the text of the first letter to the Russian Chancellor), M. de Giers pointed to its character

1 Lord Loftus to M. de Giers, Sept., 30/Oct. 12, 1876, Central Asia (1) 1878, p. 82

2 Lord Loftus to Earl of Derby, 6 Dec., 1876, Central Asia (1) 1878, p. 93

3 Kaufmann to de Giers, 9 Nov., 1876, Central Asia, p. 96

4 Lord Loftus to Derby, 17 Nov., 1876, Central Asia, p. 89

as being "a message of courtesy," and passing on the explanation of Kaufmann.¹

These explanations by the Russian Government and the general tenor of its policy, as well as the reports of his own Agent at Kabul, along with the flimsy nature of the rumoured intrigues of Amir Sher Ali with Kaufmann, should have been adequate to convince Lord Lytton, if he were so inclined, of the non-existence of any secret liaison between the Amir and Russia. But it did not suit Lord Lytton's designs to gain this conviction.² Before his arrival in India, Lord Lytton had gathered the impression that Russia had the means of closer contact with Amir Sher Ali than the British and that the Amir was gradually drifting into political relationship with the Russian empire. On this foundation was based the entire superstructure of his policy to establish British agents in Afghanistan and thereby bring that country under closer British control. It was therefore convenient to cherish the illusion of the Amir's collusion with Russia and thereby to denounce him as hostile to the British, for otherwise the measures which he contemplated and the policy he envisaged towards Afghanistan would not have been possible or justified. It was this suspicion of Amir Sher Ali's intrigues with Russia which governed the negotiations at Peshawar and wrecked all chances of peaceful adjustments.

We may also advert here to the measures adopted by Lord Lytton to place an iron ring around Afghanistan and bring the states and tribes on the Indo-Afghan frontier completely under British control and influence so as to secure appropriate bases for military action against the inalcitrant ruler of Kabul. It is unnecessary to go into the details of military or diplomatic action adopted to achieve those results. It may suffice to refer to the occupation of Quetta, the attempts to open the Kurram Valley and the control exercised over Chitral, Dir and Swat, all of which were occasioned by Lytton's policy towards Afghanistan and had the character of being preliminaries to the war which followed later.

Though the strategic importance of Quetta and the advantages which might accrue to the Government of India by occupying it had been emphasised by General John Jacob as early as the days of Lord Canning, and had been reiterated by Green, Lumsden, Rawlinson, Frere and others advocating a Forward Frontier Policy, yet under the influence of Lord Lawrence no action had been taken towards that end. In the

1 M. de Giers to Lord Loftus, 19 Nov., 1876, *Central Asia*, p. 94

2 See. Despatch, May 1877, *op. cit.*

days of Lord Northbrook, Baluchistan was torn by internal feuds, nonetheless, the Viceroy did not exploit the occasion to appropriate Quetta. Sir Robert Sandeman was able to bring order out of chaos and to secure safe passage of trade caravans through the Bolan Pass. Lord Lytton, however, was "pledged to the occupation of Quetta," and "his mind was set upon increasing the strength of the British force in Baluchistan, and so locating it that it should not only exercise a commanding influence in that state, but also menace Afghanistan."¹ Hence he sent Colonel Colley in October 1876 to conclude "with the Khan of Khalat a secret treaty, the sixth article of which provided for the permanent occupation of that prince's territory by a British military force."² Quetta was occupied and a force comprising a regiment of infantry, a squadron of cavalry and a mountain battery was established there, and supporting troops were located at Kalat, Dadar and Mithri. This occupation of Quetta, as Hanna puts it, was "at the moment, only a move in the game which Lord Lytton was playing against Sher Ali; and it was quickly followed by other measures equally well devised to cow that prince into submission, or to drive him into open hostility."³ It is remarkable that this step was taken in the interval between the return of Nawab Atta Muhammad Khan to Kabul and the holding of the Peshawar Conference, when every need was there to conciliate the Amir to accept the British demands.

Long before Lumsden had advocated British occupation of the Kurram and Khost Valleys, but nothing had been done to achieve that object. Now, as a further move in the game against Amir Sher Ali, the Government of India, on 25th November, 1876, adopted the Resolution that "In view of the possible expediency of the occupation of a military position on the Kurram border at an early date steps be taken for obtaining information (1) as to the effect such measures might have on the independent tribes of the vicinity, and (2) in regard to the military requirements of such occupation."⁴ The scheme of Lumsden and Roberts, who had "Lytton's ear," to implement this policy was to hold control of "the summit of the Shutargardan" and from there to dominate Kabul. For this purpose the road between Rawalpindi and Kohat was repaired, the approaches to the Indus at Kushalgarh were put into order and a bridge of boats built

1 Hanna I. p. 113. p. 115

2 Ibid., p. 115

3 Ibid., p. 117

4 Foreign Dept. Secret Progs., Feb., 1877, Nos. 44/50.

there, a road between Kohat and Attock was opened for the passage of guns, a big depot was formed at Kohat and a large force was kept in readiness to move there. These measures might have been initiated with the ostensible purpose of making effective the blockade against the Afridi tribes in 1876, yet one may agree with Hanna that "it is hard to believe that they were not taken with the ulterior purpose of intimidating the Amir," particularly the assembling of a large Field Force on the North-West Frontier.¹

Lord Lytton in his tour of the North-West Frontier in the autumn of 1876 (October-November) came into contact with Major Cavagnary², who is described by Hanna as "a man of rash and restless disposition and overbearing temper, consumed by the thirst for personal distinction, and as incapable of recognizing and weighing the difficulties, physical and moral, which stood in the way of the attainment of his ends, as the Viceroy over whom he was thenceforward to exercise so pernicious an influence."³ This man appears to have been entrusted with the commission of weaning the frontier tribes from the Amir's influence, securing them under British control, opening the routes into Afghanistan and effecting "the formation of Khanates in the vicinity of the British frontier under chiefs whose well-being will depend in a great measure on the recognition and support they have from our Government."⁴ The object was to gain the allegiance of Swat, Bajaur and Dir over which the Afghan Amir had influence and with whom Amir Sher Ali had intimate relations. The task took a long time to effect but Lord Lytton had set in motion the machinery to achieve the purpose before the close of 1876. The Afridis and Mohmands were also being approached, and their loyalty to the Amir had been sufficiently weakened by the time that war against Afghanistan did actually come about.

Most notable, however, was the success gained in Chitral and Yassin, which were brought under the suzerainty of the Maharaja of Kashmir and thus indirectly under British control and influence. Aman-ul-mulk of Chitral, himself a usurper and the instrument of the death of Mir Wali of Yassin, the murderer of Mr. Hayward, the Political Agent, was apprehensive of action against himself by the Amir of Kabul and sought the protection of the Maharaja of Kashmir. The Maharaja

1 Hanna, pp. 117-19 and footnote 1 on p. 119

2 Later Sir Louis Cavagnary who was assassinated in Kabul. He was at the time a Political Officer in Peshawar.

3 Hanna, pp. 119-20

4 Cavagnary to Lytton, 13 Oct. 1877, For. Dept. Sec. Progs. Oct., 1877, Nos. 272/277.

referred the matter to the Government of India and desired their guidance. Thornton, the Foreign Secretary, in his minute of 3rd May, 1876, stated that "the action to be taken, in this case appears to depend in some measure upon the policy to be adopted towards Kabul. If it is considered desirable to allow the petty Muhammadan States on our border to be swallowed up by Kabul, then the less we have to say to Chitral the better; if, on the other hand, it is considered important that the ruler of the country which commands the Barogil Pass should be our friend, it would seem politic, notwithstanding the conduct of the Chitral Chief in regard to Mr. Hayward, to authorize the Maharaja to dismiss his messenger with a civil reply; Aman-ul-mulk has done something in the way of atoning for his past misconduct by causing the death of Mir Wali, Mr. Hayward's murderer, and this being the case, we might, perhaps, be prepared to hold out hopes of reconciliation on certain conditions."¹ And the Viceroy agreed to this request of the Maharaja.²

The whole question of Chitral was thrashed out in September 1876, by the Foreign Secretary from whose notes it is clear that Chitral was claimed as a dependency by the Amir of Kabul who resented the reception of the Vakil (agent) from Chitral at Srinagar, that the Barogil and Ishkaman Passes were deemed practicable as routes for invasion, and that under the fear of aggression from Kabul the Chief of Chitral was seeking Kashmir suzerainty. His view was that in order to secure control of the passes, the Maharaja of Kashmir should be authorized to extend his boundary so as to include Yassin within his territory, either by force or by negotiation, and accept suzerainty over Chitral. The right of the British officers to be located in Gilgit or elsewhere in that territory throughout the year, and the location of British troops therein together with trade facilities, were to be stipulated for in any arrangement that might be made. On the Chief's agreeing to accept the suzerainty of Kashmir, the British Government would "assent to the arrangement" on the understanding that the Chief would consent to pay tribute to Kashmir, allow free access to British subjects and their trade, have British officers and troops in his country, not have diplomatic relations with other states without the sanction of the British Government to be obtained through the Maharaja, and refer all disputes with Kashmir to British arbitration. On these conditions the British Government would agree "to protect Chitral, Yassin and

1 Minute 3 May, 1876, F.D.S.P. 1877, June, No. 165/71 K.W.

2 Lytton's endorsement, 5 May, 1876, *Ibid.*

Mastuj from external aggression.” Thornton also referred to the fact that the stationing of British officers and troops in Gilgit would be unpalatable to the Maharaja, but he desired to gild the bitter pill by the grant of the title of “*Maharajadhiraj*” to the ruler, and the titles of K.C.S.I. and C.S.I. respectively to Dewan Jwala Sahai and Dewan Kirpa Ram, and the present of a mountain battery and 1000 Enfields to the State.¹

It was again in his Frontier tour that the Viceroy met the Maharaja of Kashmir on 17th and 18th November, 1876, and, after referring to the events in Europe as regards Russia, observed that “it was essential that such states as Chitral and Yassin should come under the control of a friend and ally of the British Government like His Highness rather than be absorbed, in the course of events, by powers inimical to Cashmere.”² The Maharaja was eager to accept the offer and was advised to bring Chitral and Yassin under his control by peaceful negotiations, for which British aid was assured; and it was also mentioned that “in the event of the Maharaja’s action ever involving him in military operations the British Government would be prepared to give him, countenance and material assistance.”³ A written authority was given to the Maharaja, at his request, in writing, on 22nd December, 1876, to commence negotiations with Chitral and Yassin.⁴ Thus was set in motion the process by which Chitral and Yassin became, before the end of 1877, feudatories of Kashmir and protected states of the British, and the claims of Kabul were unceremoniously brushed aside.

All these measures had been adopted simultaneously with the offer of treaty and subsidy to the Amir of Kabul on the condition of his receiving British agents in his country. Their

1 Minute, 25 Sept., 1876, F.D.S.P., 1877, July, No. 34/60 B.K.W.

2 Note on Relations between Cashmere and Chitral, F.D.S.P. 1878, March, No. 1, 247/53 K.W.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid. —Khareeta, dated 22nd Dec., 1876. The letter was worded as follows :—“In fulfilment of Your Highness’ desire, I have now the pleasure to repeat, in writing, what I have already expressed to you in words. It is my wish that, at as early a date as may be practicable, Your Highness will endeavour, if possible by peaceful negotiation, to bring the states of Chitral and Yassin—the Chiefs of which have already sought Your Highness’ protection—under your own control and suzerainty. In these negotiations I will gladly render, if required, such assistance as may be in my power; and I am further in a position to assure Your Highness that should the Cashmere State be at any time hereafter unavoidably involved in military operations, either for the defence or maintenance of the friendly arrangements which Your Highness is hereby authorized to conclude with the Chiefs of Chitral and Yassin, the British Government will be prepared to offer you countenance and material aid.”

purpose was to strengthen the frontiers of India and secure important observation posts on the routes leading into India from the Russian dominions in Central Asia, by having British officers and troops there. But while intended primarily as a safeguard against Russian danger of invasion, which was not believed to be probable, these steps in creating a ring of subordinate states round Afghanistan and having bases of operation against that country, were directed against Amir Sher Ali, presumably to intimidate him into submission to the new demands. If he acquiesced well and good, otherwise he could be broken as a reed, a threat which was not a mere expression of exuberance of a passionate Viceroy to his Agent for communication to the Amir. Alongside of these preparations came the Peshawar Conference.

Nawab Atta Muhammad Khan returned to Kabul charged with the mission of persuading the Amir to accept the favours which Lord Lytton was eager to confer on him in lieu of his consent to allow British agencies to be established at Herat, Kandahar, etc., and on that basis to send his envoy to arrange the terms of a treaty. It was an uphill task, for the limiting stipulation about British agents was subversive of the whole basis of Indo-Afghan relations, and the Amir was not inclined to agree to it in view of its possible effects on his people and the future of his state. Yet Atta Muhammad could inform his Government that the Amir continued to hold long consultations with his chief officers to which the Indian Agent was admitted and had, after considering all aspects of the problem, agreed to depute his Prime Minister and another officer to meet the British representatives.¹ It appears from Atta Muhammad's communications that the Amir was consulting his chiefs, and before committing himself to the conditions imposed by the Viceroy, wished to have the assent of the Kohistan chiefs, and all those who mattered.² Yet in his letter of 11th December, the Agent could report that the members of the Kabul Durbar were willing to the location of British officers on the border as "yielding to necessity, and in view of the continuance of the friendship existing between the two Governments," but "some conditions in regard to their residence must be fixed for use in the future."³ A week later the Amir was reported as being prepared to depute his officers "in order that, after making representations as to the

1 Letter from Atta Muhammad Khan, dated 23 Nov., 5 Dec., 7 Dec., and 11 Dec., 1876, *Afghan Correspondence*, pp. 192-93.

2 Letter from Atta Muhammad Khan, 18 Dec., 1876.

3 Letter, 11 Dec., 1876.

views of the Cabul Government, they may bring British officers for residence on the border.”¹ And again on 21st December, 1876, the Agent reported that the Amir after protesting his friendship for the British and adverting on the unwisdom of the location of British officers in his country, a measure which had for some time been continually pressed on him, observed that though “even now, in my opinion the residence of British officers on the border would not at all be advantageous to the (two) Governments; however, as the British authorities insist on this question every day, I have proposed, but merely to strengthen (my) friendship with the British Government, that after the ‘Id-u-Zuha’ festival the Sadr-i-Azam and Mir Akhor Ahmed Khan should go with the British Agent at Cabul to British territory; and after making representations as to the views (of the Cabul Government) settle the questions and some important conditions, and then agree to the residence of British officers on the border.”²

Finally, on the same day the Agent informed the Government of India of the decision of the Amir and communicated his observations which were presumably intended for the Viceroy's ear. The Amir is reported to have observed : “God willing, for ever, the friendship existing between our Government and the British Government will remain more firm than before, and this true friendship will never be disturbed, whatever objections or pleas have been hitherto made as to the residence of British officers on the border are owing to the savage conduct of the people of Afghanistan, and even now we agree to their residence on the border owing to helplessness. But in this matter it is most incumbent on us to represent some important conditions to the British Government; and with a view to representing these conditions (lit. difficulties) and settling all the questions (lit. objects) of the (two) Governments, I depute the Sadr-i-Azam and Mir Akhor Ahmed Khan to British territory, (and desire that) they should go with you after the Id-u-Zuha festival, and, after stating all the difficulties, and settling all questions of the (two) Governments, bring the British officers to live on the border.”³ The Amir had not mentioned the conditions, but the Agent was able to elicit those which were sought to be imposed on the establishment of British agencies. These conditions expressed merely the safeguards which the Amir and his people desired to obtain for

1 Letter from Atta Muhammad Khan, 18 Dec., 1876.

2 Letter 21 Dec., 1876. Afghan Correspondence, p. 193.

3 Ibid.

their own security. Firstly, it was desired that in case of any injury to the life and property of the agents, the matter should be determined "according to the custom and law of Afghanistan, and the British Government should not put much pressure on the Afghan Government." It was a necessary condition to prevent extra-territoriality.¹ The second condition, more vital, was that "the duties of all British officers on the border should be fully defined; they should not secretly or openly interfere with the internal civil and military affairs of Afghanistan." The third was that in case Russia desired to send her agents, the British should take measures to prevent it and "give no trouble as to this prevention to the Afghan Government." Lastly, they desired to say that if the aid was not deemed adequate, the Afghan Government should be allowed to decline it, but the residence of British officers would not be affected thereby.² To impress these conditions and to make clear the views and feelings of the Afghan Government, but at the same time to agree to the residence of British officers on the border and to settle the terms of the treaty, Nur Muhammad Shah was deputed to meet the British plenipotentiary at Peshawar.

It is obvious from the above extracts from Nawab Atta Muhammad Khan's correspondence that the Viceroy's proposals were fully discussed in view of their importance for the very existence of Afghanistan, and whatever delay occurred was due to the need for consulting all important interests in the country. From these reports there is no trace visible of any feelings of hostility of the Amir to the British or of his in any manner being influenced by Russia or her agents. In every statement reported there is clear evidence of the Amir's eagerness for British friendship and his keenness to secure their support in the existing situation in Central Asia; and it was this fact alone which might have persuaded Amir Sher Ali to agree to a demand which he most dreaded and despised. Yet Lord Lytton's Government had no scruple in misrepresenting the Amir's attitude and charging him with deliberate procrastination. On 10th May, 1877, they wrote; "About this time, events occurred in Europe the effect of which was immediately apparent on our negotiations with Sher Ali, Throughout India and Asia there was a prevalent expectation

1 A safeguard of this nature was necessary as the Afghan Government had reason to fear the repetition of the demand made at the time when Mr. Macdonald, a British traveller, was murdered in Afghanistan during the course of his passage through that country. The incident occurred during the time of Lord Northbrook.

2 Letter, 21 Dec., 1876.

that war between the Sultan and Czar was imminent; and that it must lead, ere long, to war between England and Russia. Had this expectation been realized, the policy which had hitherto governed our relations with Afghanistan would have been promptly brought to a very practical test. It was immediately evident that the Ameer had no intention of committing himself to an English alliance on the supposed eve of a war between England and Russia. His apparent policy was to stand aloof from us till the latest possible moment; and then, if he found himself unable to maintain a strict neutrality between the two belligerents, to sell his alliance to the highest bidder, Russian or English, on the dearest terms." And further they went on to say that the Amir, while delaying to give any answer to the British demand, was in secret communication with Kaufmann's agent. The anger of Lord Lytton and his Council is evident for they suspected that all the money and arms "might at any moment be used against it by His Highness," a conclusion which was as impudent as it was untrue. In conclusion they wrote; "At length the Ameer, finding himself unable to evade any longer the issue put to him, without bringing his relations with us to an open rupture (a result no more compatible with his purpose than placing them on a definitely cordial footing) dispatched his Minister . . . and wrote to the Commissioner (Peshawar), briefly informing him of the Minister's departure with instructions to open negotiations; but without noticing the Viceroy's letter, or answering the invitation it contained."¹ The palpable incorrectness of this conclusion will be exposed by a reference to the extracts quoted above. Lord Lytton demanded an immediate monosyllabic assent to his most unreasonable and intimidating demand, and because the Amir tarried to consider it, he was to be arraigned as hostile, ungrateful and prepared to sell himself to the highest bidder. But such misrepresentation alone suited the purpose which the Viceroy had so close to his heart.

Meanwhile, on this side in India, instructions had been issued to the plenipotentiary, Sir Lewis Pelly, and the draft of a treaty had been prepared for the Amir's acceptance.² The main objects of the negotiations were defined "firstly, to provide for the external security of Afghanistan, and secondly, to ensure the internal tranquillity of that state in a manner conducive to British interest." And these were to be achieved only by

1 Despatch to Secretary of State, 10 May, 1877. Op. cit.

2 Thornton to Pelly, 17 Oct., 1876 and *Aide Memoire* for Treaty, enclosures 23, 24, 25 in No. 36. Afghan Correspondence, pp. 187-92.

more definite arrangements. viz., the establishment of British agents in that country. Hence the tone to be adopted by Pelly in his negotiations was to insist on this measure, and he was instructed that the demand now put forth was a mere reiteration of what Sher Ali had volunteered at Ambala, which the Government of India had for its own reasons not accepted then. However, the situation had since altered both in Europe and Central Asia which would render "inexpedient any prolongation of uncertainty as to the policy of the Afghan Government, or its practical means of self-defence in the event of future complications in Central Asia."

Pelly was told that the Amir had been informed that assistance "immediate and material in the protection of the Afghan frontier against foreign aggression" would be given to him "on the condition desired by the Ameer in 1869, viz., the location of competent British Agents on the frontier." Hence "on this point, your negotiations with the Ameer's Minister will be confined to the friendly arrangement of the measures necessary to give practical effect to this principle." He was also advised to represent to the Minister the advantages in having a British agent at Kabul, but this demand was not to be pressed. The other matter which he was commissioned to discuss was that relating to trade and the entry of British subjects for the purpose, though the Amir should not be made responsible for their safety. It was stated in this connection that "the Government does not desire to impose on the Ameer burdens which His Highness is demonstrably unable to sustain. Its object is not to weaken but to strengthen his hands." Next, he was to discuss the measures necessary for "speedy improvement of the means of communication" and seek the Amir's co-operation "in establishing and maintaining a line of telegraph between certain points on Afghan and British territories, the selection of which may properly form one of the subjects of your negotiation." The cost was to be borne by the British Government, but the Amir had to guarantee the protection of these lines. These were the *sine qua non* of the opening of negotiations. But, though not of the same category, there were other conditions which Pelly was instructed to impose on the Amir and use as the basis of his negotiations, for they were deemed to be "essential to the satisfactory conclusion of them, and which should be agreed to by the Ameer before the British Government can, on its part, formally undertake the protection of His Highness at home and abroad, within the limits indicated by the Viceroy to the Cabul Agent." The first of these related to "the effective control over the foreign relations of

Afghanistan" so that "the Ameer's external policy must not be conducted without reference to its (British) advice." The second concerned the "free, frequent, and friendly intercourse" between the British Government and all its subjects on the one hand and the Amir and "the tribes and Sirdars under his authority on the other." "Offers of assistance in men, money and arms" were contingent on the abandonment by the Amir of his policy of preventing British subjects from entry into his country and frank intercourse with its people. It was stated that "the British Government cannot be his friend in need, and his friend in deed, if the friendship on which he is to reckon in his need finds, meanwhile, no recognition in his deeds." The third had reference "to an understanding with the Ameer, representative" for "mutual aid in the more friendly and effective control of the Afreedee tribes who now infest the Khyber pass."¹

In conclusion, the Government of India analysed the "character and extent" of the "Imperial support" which the "Ameer and his dynasty" might expect from the British Government. The negotiations of 1869 were invoked in this connection, and it was clearly explained that they had no desire "to interfere in the internal affairs of Afghanistan." Neither was a war as on behalf of Shah Shuja to be repeated, nor could the British Government "contract any obligation to support the Princes of Afghanistan against the opposition of the Afghan nation, or any large majority of their subjects whose loyalty has been alienated by misgovernment or oppression." However, "subject to these limitations" the Government of India would be prepared to "do all that may be practically in its power to maintain the just authority of the Ameer, or his recognized successor, against those intrigues and conspiracies of unlawful and unscrupulous pretenders to the throne which are incompatible with settled order, good government and peace of the country." The "precise form" of such assistance would "depend upon the circumstances of the moment" and would not admit of "anticipatory definition in any formal document." On these conditions, and on the "loyal fulfilment of all his own obligations" under the treaty "pecuniary or military assistance" and the services of British officers would be given to the Amir for the fortifications of his frontiers and "the better organization of his military force." "Distinct recognition" of the succession of Abdulla Jan was also to be included in the treaty. And finally, Pelly was exhorted to see that in the treaty he was to negotiate, there was "a fair and full reciprocity of benefit to

1 Thornton to Pelly, 17 Oct., 1876.

the contracting parties. For the weighty obligations which, on this condition, the British Government is not unwilling to undertake in the interests of the Ameer, it will be your duty to secure an adequate return substantially advantageous to British interests."¹ The draft of a treaty with an "*Aide Memoire* for subsidiary secret and explanatory agreement" which expatiated further the terms of the treaty was given to Sir Lewis Pelly.² In the latter we find a definition of the word "foreign enemy," conditions about correspondence with foreign powers, the habitat of the British agents, and expenses relating to telegraphic line, and the mention of aid in case of internal trouble and of the amount of subsidy which was to be Rupees 20 lakhs on the ratification of the treaty and Rupees 12 lakhs annually.

It has been necessary to give in detail the preliminary basis of the negotiations at Peshawar on both sides in order to understand clearly what each party desired and to what extent it was willing to concede the demands of the other. It is evident from the Kabul Agent's correspondence that the Amir was agreeable to the basic condition of the alliance, but had charged his envoy to lay bare his objections and the difficulties involved in the establishment of British agencies as a preface to the conditions which he desired to be accepted by the British for such residence of British officers in his country. The Amir was eager for assistance and an alliance based on a treaty and had reluctantly agreed to accept the limiting obligation. On the other hand, the British Plenipotentiary was charged with the duty of imposing conditions which would have the effect of subordinating the foreign relations of the Amir to the British control and which were directed towards opening his country for British officers and traders. On their acceptance he was authorised to agree to the obligation of aid against foreign invasion and internal disorder as well as for the support of his recognized successor, but constant reference to the negotiations of 1869 did not leave these concessions completely free from the vagueness which had attached to the earlier declarations of assistance. The Viceroy does not appear to have been willing in essence to go beyond the equivocal assurances given earlier, and his insistence in the despatch of 10th May, 1877, that the concessions sanctioned by Her Majesty's Government "would not practically commit the British Government to anything more than a formal re-affirmation of the assurances given by it, through Lord Mayo, to the Ameer in 1869"³ would lead us to believe, with the Duke

1 Thornton to Pelly, 17 Oct. 1876.

2 Enclosures 24 and 25 in No. 36, Afghan Correspondence, pp. 189-92

3 Despatch to Secretary of State, 10 May, 1877.

of Argyll, that in the draft treaty "most elaborate precautions" were "taken to prevent the assurances given from coming near to the guarantees which the Ameer really wanted."¹ The limitations were, as the Duke of Argyll holds, "all elaborately designed to keep in the hands of the British Government, under the form of a Treaty, that complete freedom to judge of each case as it might arise, according to times and circumstances, which Lord Mayo and Lord Northbrook had been determined to maintain. It was, however, precisely for the purpose of limiting this freedom that the Ameer had desired to get a Treaty. To offer him a Treaty which kept that freedom as it was, could be no response to his desires. It was, therefore, worse than an "ostensible pretext" to represent such a Treaty as a concession to the Ameer of that for which he had asked."² On the basis of these equivocal concessions, Pelly was to demand prior and absolute conformity to the demand for British agents. He was fully infected with the conviction that the Amir was but a suppliant for British favours, that the conference was being held as a concession to him and that the very act of sending his envoy was the frank acceptance of the British demand by the Amir. Though there was no fundamental difference as to the ultimate object of the negotiations, yet there was a wide gap between the viewpoints of the two plenipotentiaries about the mode of approach to the problem, which, in the absence of any desire for compromise and inclination even to understand the viewpoint of his adversary in Pelly, wrecked from its very start the chances of the success of the Peshawar Conference.

It will be futile to wade through the long discussions, statements and counter-statements which were indulged in Peshawar for about three months in early 1877, as the two envoys could never reach the stage of tackling the problem for which they had met. The discussion apparently ended on the issue whether there was any misunderstanding or misapprehension on the part of the Amir and whether he had sought from the Viceroy concessions both to remove these misapprehensions and to strengthen his position in view of the external and internal danger facing him. Nur Muhammad Shah made constant reference to the Ambala and Simla Conferences and endeavoured to bring home to the British envoy the point that all assurances and earlier agreements on which the Amir placed full reliance, and which from his point of view were binding, were all made by the Government of India in their own interest and without being solicited by the Amir. He insisted that all

1 Argyll, II, p. 433

2 Argyll, II, p. 435

agreements, and not only the Treaty of 1855, were binding, and repudiated the assumption that without freedom of access to the British officers in Afghanistan friendship between the two states would not subsist. He pointed out the difficulties associated with the residence of British officers and recalled the earlier guarantees given by the previous Viceroys against it.¹ But his spirited, sincere and reasoned protests fell on unwilling ears; for, true to his instructions, Pelly merely harped on one point, whether the Amir was willing to accept the British agents or not, for otherwise, no discussions could proceed.² The whole trend of the 'negotiations' at Peshawar was contrary to the interpretation of that term and disclosed the bankruptcy of British diplomacy, and exposed the unwisdom and rigidity of the plenipotentiary, whose services were so highly appreciated by his master. The whole course of discussions was communicated to the Viceroy whose views and decisions, which admitted of no comment by the Afghan envoy, were communicated to him by Sir Lewis Pelly on 15th March, 1877, and virtually brought the Peshawar Conference to a close.³

This communication is remarkable both for its audacity as well as the uncompromising attitude of Lord Lytton towards Afghanistan. It makes clear that the Viceroy believed in having either a submitting, dependent Afghanistan or having no relations with it. The Viceroy discussed Nur Muhammad's statements in two parts, those relating to the past and to the present. On the former his comment was that the resentment and annoyance which the Amir had harboured had grown out of the absence of a British Resident at his court, who would have promptly dispelled all misapprehensions and established the relations on an amicable footing. And he regretted that the Amir "should still feel himself precluded by the rude and stationary condition in which Afghanistan has remained under the administration of His Highness, from receiving a British Envoy at his Court, and thereby placing his relations with the British Government on a footing commensurate with the rank and dignity which, were it possible, the British Government would willingly accord to the Ruler of Afghanistan in the international hierarchy of those States with which the British Empire maintains diplomatic relations."⁴ This was an insinuation both insulting and incorrect and held out a temptation to the Amir which it was reported he most desired. It is, however,

1 Record of meetings at Peshawar particularly dated 8th, 10th and 12th Feb., 1877, *Afghan Correspondence*, pp. 203-209

2 Record of meetings dated 15th and 19th Feb., 1877. *Ibid.* pp. 209-214

3 Pelly to Nur Muhammad Shah, 15th March, 1877. *Ibid.* p. 214

4 *Ibid.*, para. 8.

to the Viceroy's reactions about the second part that we should advert for these reflect his policy at the moment. After emphasising the fiction of the Amir's dissatisfaction with the existing relations and his equal resentment at the proposal "now spontaneously made for the improvement of them," as also to the generosity of the British Government in proffering aid and going "to the utmost limit of concession" which had been declined by him, the Viceroy declared, "if these proposals be rejected unconditionally, or entertained only on conditions obviously inadmissible, the British Government shall have no choice but to regard His Highness the Ameer Sher Ali of Cabul henceforth as a neighbour with whom its relations are neither satisfactory nor susceptible of improvement." Next, the Viceroy denied the contention of Nur Muhammad Shah that the earlier treaties and agreements limited the right of the British Government to send British officers to Afghanistan, and, on the contrary, stated his impression that both Amir Sher Ali and his father had induced the British Government to believe that the advantages of such an arrangement would be cordially welcomed and appreciated by His Highness. But if this belief was erroneous there would be "an immediate end of the matter; for the British Government has not the slightest desire to urge upon an unwilling neighbour an arrangement so extremely onerous to itself." And Nur Muhammad Shah was asked to make clear if "the Ameer does not now desire the alliance of the British Government and that His Highness refuses to receive British officers in any part of Afghanistan." It was also said that any discussion at that stage of the expediency of the measure was "a breach of the understanding on which the Viceroy agreed to receive you as the Ameer's representative in this negotiation." The arrangement about British officers was represented as a great concession, and because the Amir was reluctant to accept it, "there is nothing left to propose or discuss; and in that case, the two Governments will, in accordance with the wishes of His Highness, revert to their previous relative positions."

This was no empty threat, and Pelly took pains to expound the implications of this position. The only treaty binding was that of 1855 which during the last four years the Amir was blamed of evading and infracting. Yet that treaty could not be abrogated, and under it the Amir was "legally bound by it to co-operate with the British Government, if called upon to do so, in attacking its enemies and defending its friends, although the Treaty does not place the British Government under any reciprocal obligation on behalf of the Ameer." No secret was made of the interpretation that "under the terms of the Treaty of

1855, the British Government has contracted no liabilities whatever on behalf of the Ameer." Subsequently the Viceroy did not hesitate to cruelly explode the Amir's complacency by repeating that under the two treaties made, and there was no other agreement besides, the British Government, "either directly or indirectly" was under no "obligation, or liability, whatsoever, to defend, protect, or support the Ameer, or the Ameer's dynasty, against any enemy, or any danger, foreign or domestic." The Amir could have therefore "no claim upon the unconditional support of the British Government." The validity of the declarations of 1869 or 1873 was disputed, for the situation had altered and the Amir was not agreeable to the main reciprocal basis of those assurances. And because the Amir, as interpreted from the language of Nur Muhammad Shah, did not desire British alliance or protection, the British Government would not press their alliance but withdraw the terms offered through Nawab Atta Muhammad. In the end, it was emphasised that there was no quarrel with the people of Afghanistan whose "independence, prosperity and peace" was desired and against whom, unless excited by their rulers, no aggression was intended. But at the same time "all liabilities on behalf of the Ameer and his dynasty" were repudiated, for no such obligations were ever incurred, and "without adequate guarantee for the satisfactory conduct of the Ameer" no such obligations could be undertaken. This statement concluded with the assurance that "the British Government will scrupulously continue, as hitherto, to respect the Ameer's independence and authority throughout those territories which, up to the present moment, it has recognized as being in the lawful possession of the Ameer, and will duly abstain from interference so long as the Ameer, on his part, no less scrupulously abstains from every kind of interference with tribes or territories not his own."¹

This statement is remarkable for its undisguised assertion that, without the Amir's unconditional acceptance of the demand for British agents, the British Government could not either include Afghanistan within the orbit of the protected and friendly states or treat its ruler as deserving of support in case of external or internal danger. The most serious implication, however, related to a distinction between the ruler and his people and the recognition of only such territories forming part of the Amir's lawful dominions as existed under his control in 1855. Both these had serious consequences and give a clue to the policy of Lord Lytton. It may also be emphasised here

¹ Pelly to Nur Muhammad Shah, 15 March, 1877.

that Lord Lytton was in a desperate hurry to close the Conference, and even when he was informed, while Nur Muhammad Shah was critically ill, that a fresh envoy was coming with instruction to agree to all the demands, he closed the door for further negotiations.¹ The despatch of 10th May, 1877 has revealed that "a fresh Envoy was already on the way from Cabul to Peshawar; and it was reported that this Envoy had authority to accept eventually all the conditions of the British Government. The Viceroy was aware of these facts when he instructed our Envoy to close the Conference. But it appeared to His Excellency that liabilities which the British Government might properly have contracted on behalf of the present Ameer of Cabul, if that Prince had shown any eagerness to deserve and reciprocate its friendship, could not be advantageously, or even safely, accepted in face of the situation revealed by Sir Lewis Pelly's energetic investigations. Under these circumstances, the prolongation of the Peshawar Conference could only lead to embarrassments and entanglements best avoided by the timely termination of it."²

The unseemly haste with which the negotiations were closed leads to the suspicion that either the Viceroy wished to "avoid further entanglement" and wriggle out of a situation and terms which he was not prepared to implement, or that he had some ulterior motive and that his intention in holding the Conference was merely to probe into the feelings of the Amir, and by misrepresenting him to seek an excuse for aggressive designs. It is, however, certain that the negotiations did not proceed beyond the elementary explanations of the viewpoints of the two, and there was no opportunity taken to unfold the scope or extent of the concessions which the Viceroy so generously was prepared to offer to the Amir, in lieu of his consent for British agents in Herat. It may also be surmised that the Viceroy was not prepared to limit the functions of the agents and to agree to the conditions which the Amir desired to impose on their residence in his country. It is difficult to diagnose the trend of Lord Lytton's mind at this date, but the later events and the preparations which were fast proceeding to win over the tribes and establish British forces on his frontier, lead to the conclusion that Lord Lytton was contemplating warlike measures to achieve the object which Amir Sher Ali was not willingly prepared to concede. The result was that Nawab Atta Muhammad was not sent to Kabul, and for the time being the relations

1 Memorandum, enclosure 47 in No. 36; Viceroy to Pelly, 30 March, 1877, Afghan Correspondence, pp. 220-2

2 Despatch to Secretary of State, 10 May, 1877, para. 36.

between the two States reverted to the stage of first relationship.

Meanwhile events in Trans-Caspiana had been moving fast, and the Government of India took alarm at the alleged preparations of Russia on the Oxus and General Lomakin's advance against the Akhal Tekkes.¹ The danger that Merv might soon be annexed by Russia and Herat be threatened at a time when the relations with Afghanistan were none too satisfactory, led the Government of India to consider measures for meeting that situation. At the same time the crisis in the Near East was also deepening, and on occasions it appeared that England might be called upon to take up arms on behalf of Turkey against Russia. The protection of the Suez Canal and of British interests in the eastern Mediterranean had been an important basis of Disraeli's foreign policy. All these factors had their influence on Lord Lytton's dealings with Kabul and gave shape and force to his policy towards Afghanistan. In May 1877, the Government of India informed the Secretary of State that "we see no reason to anticipate any act of aggression on the part of the present Ameer, or on our own part any cause for interference with His Highness." They were prepared to await the "natural development" of events in Kabul and were banking on their friendship with the people of Afghanistan among whom disaffection against Amir Sher Ali was supposed to be growing. The relations then were believed to be "such as we commonly maintain with the Chiefs of neighbouring and friendly countries."² But not long after, on 2nd July, 1877, owing to the new complexion of events in Central Asia, chiefly directed against the Turkomans by Russia, the Government of India wrote to the Secretary of State that "the progress of events in Afghanistan" had greatly increased the importance of Merv. If they could "count on maintaining a paramount influence at Cabul and Herat," the occupation of Merv by Russia would be treated as a remote danger. But they represented that "British influence has been steadily replaced by Russian influence at Cabul, and we can now no longer reckon on the prevalence of British interests at Herat as a counterpoise to the presence of Russian regiments at Merv." And after recounting the dangers of Russian advance on Merv and expressing their feeling that if the Amir's attitude was satisfactory he could have been encouraged to occupy Merv, they wrote that the influence of the Government of India at Kabul was so feeble "that during the reign of the present Ameer it will probably be impossible for the Government of India to effect, by diplomatic means alone, the object of "having British

¹ See Ch. VIII.

² Despatch to Secretary of State, 10 May, 1877, para. 40

Agents at Herat," etc., and added "if it be still possible either to prevent, or to counteract, the speedy results we anticipate from the occupation of Kizil Arvat, and the collection of military stores and transport at Charjui, by the Russian forces in Central Asia, it can only be by some means wholly independent of the co-operation, and wholly regardless of the resistance, of Sher Ali."¹

These measures were expounded in the last part of the despatch. Once again reverting to the course desirable for preventing the lapse of Merv to Russia: the Government of India emphasised the advantage in an alliance between "Merv-Turkoman and the Afghans. . . . If the British Government were now in a position to exercise over the Afghan Power that friendly, legitimate, and salutary influence which has so long been the declared object of its policy." But that was not so, and, in the circumstances, they apprehended that "while British Agents are excluded from Western Afghanistan," Merv was occupied by Russian troops, "the question of Russian or British supremacy in Afghanistan will be virtually decided." This can be counterpoised only by the "establishment of a commanding British influence at Herat." But the Amir was not prepared for it, and though the Government of India did not "despair entirely of Ameer being brought to a truer sense of his interests," they did not consider it probable within a reasonable time. Hence there was immediacy about considering "what will be our position, if the Ameer continues to reject all offers of our assistance or alliance, while Russia increases her influence at Cabul, and from Merv commands Herat. We shall then be obliged to choose between surrendering Afghanistan altogether to Russia, or taking more vigorous action than we have yet taken to secure our interests there." The first alternative was dangerous for the integrity of the British hold over India. Hence the second was the only feasible course, which was thus outlined by Lord Lytton's Government :

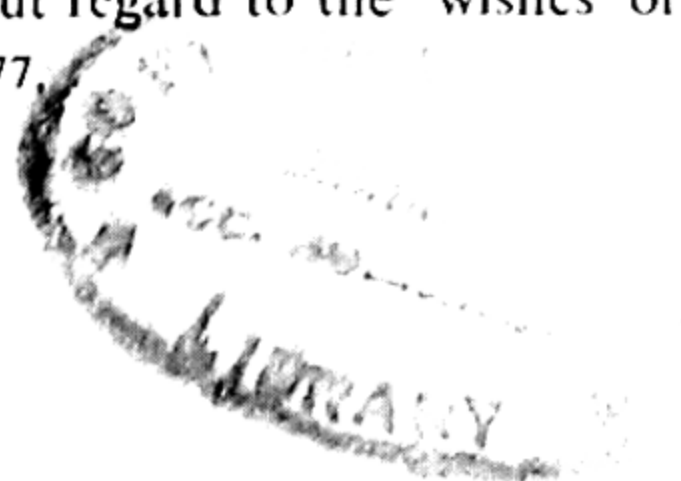
"Whilst, therefore, it is to the possibility of friendly relations with Afghanistan, and the peaceful establishment of our influence over the country on a footing adequately spacious and secure, that we still look for the best solution of the problem now before us, we cannot conceal from ourselves, or from the Government of Her Majesty, that the time may come (and at no very distant date) when, in order to maintain the British Power in India, it will be absolutely necessary to undertake the military occupation of Western Afghanistan (whether with, or without, the consent of the Ruler of that country) including

¹ Despatch to Secretary of State, 2 July, 1877, F.D.S.P. 1877 Nov., No. 129.

the important fortress of Herat. The position of the present Ameer is evidently very precarious; and it is possible that the course of events may result in the dismemberment of his kingdom, and the formation of a separate Khanate in Western Afghanistan, which it might be quite feasible to bring under British influence and protection. . . . But whatever be the issue of the present state of affairs at Cabul, it appears to us obvious that, if we are to avert the dangers now threatening us from the persistent advances of Russia, we must be prepared to take up promptly such a position as will effectually prevent the possibility of that Power obtaining a footing in Afghanistan."¹

Here we find a clear enunciation of Lord Lytton's policy towards Afghanistan in all its austere nakedness, that as a counterpoise to Russian advance in the Turkoman territory the British Government should establish a commanding position at Herat, and for that purpose detach Western Afghanistan from Amir Sher Ali's control and bring it under close British influence. And to the achievement of this object which could be realised by war alone, though intrigue was directed to this end, were his energy and policy eminently bent. The trend of events in Europe was favourable to it. But Her Majesty's Government did not readily yield their consent to it. In his despatch of 4th October, 1877, Lord Salisbury desired that the Amir "be left for a time to reflect upon the knowledge which he has acquired. There are already indications of a change for the better in the attitude of the Ameer." Progressive improvement in that would be "speedily attained by abstention for the present, on the one hand, from any hostile pressure on His Highness, and, on the other, from any renewed offer of the concessions which have been refused." Next after discounting the imminence of external aggression, and emphasising the desire to station agents at Herat, the Secretary of State instructed that if the Amir would manifest within a reasonable time "a desire to come to a friendly understanding with your Excellency on the basis of the terms lately offered to, but declined by him, his advances should not be rejected. If, on the other hand, he continues to maintain an attitude of isolation and scarcely veiled hostility, the British Government stands unpledged to any obligations, and, in any contingencies which may arise in Afghanistan, will be at liberty to adopt such measures for the protection and permanent tranquility of the north-west frontier of Her Majesty's Indian dominions as the circumstances of the moment may render expedient, without regard to the wishes of

¹ Despatch to Secretary of State, 2 July, 1877.



the Ameer Sher Ali or the interests of his dynasty.”¹ Further, in reply to the despatch of 2nd July, the Secretary of State discounted the danger to Merv and desired abstinence from aggression. Yet preparedness was enjoined and the Government of India was exhorted for the purpose of strengthening its position “to obtain a friendly influence over the Ruler of Afghanistan.” And reverting to the importance of “further and speedier knowledge of the course of events upon and beyond the frontier of Afghanistan,” Lord Salisbury wrote that the “arrangements necessary for permanently securing the result are so dependent upon the goodwill of the Cabul Government that on your success in this direction will in a great measure depend the issue of your more general dealings with the Ameer.”² There was, thus, at the moment no countenance for Lord Lytton’s aggressive policy of carving a dependent separate principality of Western Afghanistan, and he had merely to bide his time.

On the Indian frontier, Lord Lytton had continued all those preparations which, as stated earlier, had the object of winning over the tribes and chiefs from Afghan allegiance to dependence on the British. In Europe events were rapidly moving to bring about a breakdown of all peaceful efforts to solve the Eastern Question, and to precipitate hostilities between Russia and England. With the Russo-Turkish War and the threat by Disraeli to mobilize forces against Russia in the Dardanelles, the other empire appears to have moved troops, as a counterpoise, to positions of vantage on the Oxus, which caused a wave of alarm in Afghanistan and India. It was as an important link in the chain of actions to counteract British hostility that the Russian Government had decided to send a mission under General Stolietoff to Kabul to gain Amir Sher Ali’s confidence and support for the Russian interests. It is generally believed that the Amir had no love for the Russians and, though epistolary communications had become frequent and rumours of secret negotiations for treaty alliance were current there is no confirmation of the fact that he had decided at any stage to submit to the Russian will or their subordination. At best, as Hanna says, he was merely watching the situation and trying to exploit the hostility between the two empires.³ Hence, under the show of force and not being prepared to resist the Russian entry owing to the not even veiled hostility of Lord Lytton and

1 Despatch from the Secretary of State, Secret No. 64. 4 Oct., 1877, paras. 9 and 11. *Afghan Correspondence*, pp. 222-4

2 Despatch from Secretary of State. *F.D.S.P.* 1878 Oct., No. 11.

3 Hanna, I pp. 183-93.

the absence of hope of support on this side, Amir Sher Ali reluctantly admitted the Russian Mission and received it with all pretence of honour and dignity for a friendly mission. How far the Russian Mission achieved any positive advantages and whether any draft of a treaty was prepared, are moot questions of history. But the probability is that arriving after the Berlin Treaty and Russia having no desire to wage war with England, the Stolietoff Mission was but a frustrated attempt. Yet the very presence of the Russian officers in Kabul acted as a red rag to Lord Lytton, for he immediately decided to send a British Mission there. In his telegram of 2nd August, 1878, the Viceroy dilated on the humiliation caused to the British empire by this hostile act of the Amir in receiving the Russian officers, and opined: "To remain inactive now, will be to allow Afghanistan to fall as certainly and as completely under Russian power and influence as the Khanates. We believe we could correct the situation if allowed to treat it as a question between us and the Ameer, and probably could do so without recourse to force."¹ Hence the proposal for a British Mission which it was believed would not be resisted. This Mission was to repeat the offers contemplated earlier. The Viceroy also mentioned that the "Amir is aware we are in a position to enforce our demands. Failing in these endeavours to re-establish the preponderance of British influence in Afghanistan which we believe to be necessary for the safety of India, we shall then have to consider what measures are necessary for the protection and permanent tranquillity of our North-Western frontier."² The proposal was approved,³ and Sir Neville Chamberlain was selected to lead the Mission.⁴

Lord Lytton's policy towards Afghanistan and his general views about the developments in Central Asia and the measures which should be adopted by the British Government to counteract them, are clearly laid down in his minute of 4th September, 1878.⁵ It is not necessary at this stage to analyse its contents, but we would examine the instructions which were given to the envoy which give us an insight into the mind of the Government of India at the moment. The envoy was directed to "ascertain what misunderstandings exist between the British Government and the Amir, and to endeavour to clear them up. If these misunderstandings cannot be removed, or if

1 Telegram, Viceroy to Secretary of State, 2 Aug., 1878, *Afghan Correspondence*, p. 228

2 Ibid.

3 Telegram from Secretary of State, 3 Aug., 1878.

4 Despatch to Secretary of State, Secret No. 61, 19, Aug., 1878.

5 Minute dated 4 Sept., 1878. *Afghanistan* (1881) No. 2, pp. 4-21

the Amir is found to be not ill-disposed, the envoy will intimate that the British Government are prepared to place their political connexions with Kabul upon an improved footing; and that there are two essential conditions of an alliance. The first is the withdrawal of any Russian Agency that may still be in Afghanistan, and the complete exclusion, henceforward, of Russian Agents from His Highness' dominions; and the second condition is the establishment within the Amir's territories of English officers accredited to him by our Government." Upon this basis the envoy was authorised to offer subsidy, recognition of successor and engagement "to defend the Amir's present territories, if Russia, or any State under Russian influence, attempts to take possession of any part of them."¹ But the Mission did not become a reality for the Viceroy did not have patience to await the pleasure of the Amir, and against the advice of his Indian emissary who had cautioned against precipitancy, the mission was forced on the Amir. The result was that it was not permitted to advance beyond Ali Masjid, and as agreed to earlier, was dispersed.²

It will be interesting to know the extreme disappointment of the Viceroy and his reactions to this repulse. In his despatch of 26th September, 1878, Lord Lytton wrote to the Secretary of State: "It is to be regretted that this final endeavour on the part of our Government to arrive at some definite understanding with the Amir of Kabul should have been thus met with repudiation and affront. We submit, nevertheless, that the situation of affairs and their tendency, left us no choice but to make the attempt; and that we employed the only method, which offered any chance of success. The obviously growing estrangement of the Amir, his attitude towards us of exclusion and scarcely veiled hostility during the past twelve months, and his disregard of the amicable overtures made to him in 1876-77, gave to his formal reception, in August last, of Russian emissaries the character of a grave political declaration. It appeared quite possible, however, that the significance of this event might have been over-rated or misconstrued in India, or that the Amir himself might be induced, by timely diplomatic representations, to realize the gravity of his action, and to appreciate its inevitable effect upon his relations with our Government. But the only hope of clearing up any such misunderstandings, or of bringing our legitimate influence to bear upon the Amir, lay

1 Instructions from Secretary to the Govt. of India to Sir Neville Chamberlain, No. 1912 P. dated 7 Sept., 1878; Lytton's Minute, 4 Sept., 1878 paras. 64-78, Afghanistan (1881) No. 2; Hanna, I. pp. 200-3

2 Telegram to Secretary of State, 26 Sept., 1878; Despatch to Secretary of State, Secret No. 93, 26 Sept., 1878. Afghan Correspondence, pp. 237-9

in the renewal of direct personal intercourse with him through a British Envoy. And there appeared to be no way left open by which this end could be attained, other than the simple and straight course of despatching a Mission immediately to Kabul. To have asked the Amir whether he would receive the Mission, and to have awaited his time and pleasure, would have been a futile repetition of an experiment which had failed already. The repulse of Sir Neville Chamberlain by Sher Ali at his frontier while the Russian emissaries are still at his capital, has proved the inutility of diplomatic expedients, and has deprived the Amir of all claim upon our further forbearance."¹ It is a specious plea for the defence of his inconsiderate and impolitic act in pushing an unwanted mission and precipitating its entry into Afghanistan. There is no explanation here for his refusal to wait a few days, which might have possibly helped a peaceful solution of the matter. After the reception of the Russian embassy there was greater likelihood of the British Mission being received, if the time and manner of its despatch had been suitable. The Amir objected to the mode of its approach, which alone created a crisis, and lends itself to the impression that it was deliberately chosen by Lord Lytton to humiliate the Amir, and, on his refusal, to hold him out as an enemy with whom the sword alone should be the basis of negotiations.

The next question was of avenging the insult and punishing the Amir for his impudence to thwart the designs of the Viceroy and forcibly repulse a friendly mission. Lord Lytton was for immediate war, but under pressure from Her Majesty's Government which was not prepared to go to that extreme then, the formality of an ultimatum was gone through, the text of which was drafted by the Secretary of State.² By this ultimatum, apology was demanded and the Amir was to accept a permanent British Mission and not to injure the tribes in friendly dealings with the British; and the time limit up to 20th November, 1878 was given to him. If no favourable reply was received till then the Amir was to be treated as an enemy. And as chance would have it, the Amir's reply, courteous and yielding, was received a few days after the dead line. The die was then cast and the troops, which had been assembled long before, started on their march into Afghanistan to punish a ruler whose only fault was that he loved the independence of his people. The notification issued to the people of Afghanistan made a distinction between the ruler and his subjects and said that the armies were sent merely to punish a recalcitrant Amir from

1 Despatch to Secretary of State, 26 Sept., 1878.

2 Telegrams from Secretary of State, dated 25th and 30th Oct., 1878.

whose tyranny the people were to be freed. Thus war was begun at a time when Russia had quitted the field and the pretence of a danger from that quarter could not be legitimately held. The war was forced on an Amir who had no intention to ally himself with Russia and who had shown inclination to accept even the most inconvenient British demands. But the diplomatic method did not suit Lord Lytton's ambition to dominate Afghanistan and have a mere feudatory on the throne of Kabul. It did not at the same time square with his plan to separate Western Afghanistan from the possession of Kabul so that he might give free vent to his schemes of defence and Forward Frontier Policy in the ultimate fight against Russian imperialism in Central Asia. These views, rather than the infidelity of Amir Sher Ali, were at the root of the war which started in November, 1878, and violently disturbed the placed progress of Indo-Afghan friendship. Negotiations not being satisfactory, the sword was to decide the issue and bring the Amir to his knees.

CHAPTER XII

POST-WAR SETTLEMENT IN AFGHANISTAN

LORD Lytton had exploited the incident at Ali Masjid for giving effect to his set notions of frontier defence, and, as Noyce puts it, "a comparatively harmless incident was, by a dexterous concealment of material facts, magnified into an important rebuff, the only possible way of avenging which was by war."¹ The pretext had been used for achieving results which the Viceroy had so ardently desired. Before the war could be foreseen, the Government of India, in their despatch of 2nd July, 1877, had hinted on the eventual necessity of undertaking the military occupation of Western Afghanistan including Herat, and creating a separate Khanate there under British protection and influence.² But for some time this coveted solution of the Afghanistan problem was not brought to the forefront, and more modest projects were alone contemplated. Lord Lytton's views were determined merely by the inevitability of conflict between the Russian and British empires in Central Asia, and he was keen to find a line where the two opposing forces might meet with advantage to the British. The intermediate states, whether Afghanistan, Kalat, Kashgar or Chitral, were to be adjusted in his plan to defeat Russian aggression southward. Thus as pawns, their territories and their independence were to be twisted to serve the objects of British policy. In a masterly minute on 4th September, 1878, Lord Lytton gave frank expression to his views, and, though these did not have the concord of his Government, are of importance in understanding his mind on the eve of the war and the trend of the plans for subsequent settlement.³

His initial assumption was that Russia and England, "the two great rival Powers in Central Asia," have "continued uninterruptedly for two centuries" to approach and the progress had been "at an ever accelerating rate, as if governed by the laws of attraction that rule material bodies." From this he concluded that in less than a generation the two would be "conterminous in the East" and the problem was where "that contact shall take place", which might be either on "the present frontier of one of the two countries, or some intermediate line."

1 Noyce : *England, India and Afghanistan*, p. 98

2 Despatch to Secretary of State, 2 July, 1877.

3 Minute, 4 Sept., 1878, encl. 1, in No. 1, Afgh. (1181), No. 2, p. 4.

Examining the then frontiers of both the empires, Lord Lytton came to the conclusion that both had weak frontiers "at which they cannot willingly accept contact with a great rival Power; and are equally urged forward by considerations of military and political expediency, and by the instinct of self-preservation, towards the Hindu Kush, the great natural boundary between India and Central Asia." It may here be mentioned that this premise had conveniently ignored the successful attempts to maintain a line of buffer states which had served the purpose before forwardism dominated the policy in India, or perhaps in Russia. Next, he examined the country lying between the frontiers of the two empires, which he regarded as containing "the key to both India and Turkistan." The mountain range extending from Herat to the Pamirs and beyond to the east of Kashmir was the natural barrier, but it was traversed by a number of routes which connected the possessions of Russia and England. These he classified in three groups; the eastern comprising the routes leading from Kashgaria over the Karakoram through Ladakh and Kashmir to India; the central comprising three roads, one from Kashgarh, Khokand and the Pamir Steppe by Chitral, second from Bokhara and Samarkand by the Bamian and other passes on the Hindu Kush and third from Herat and Merv, by Maimna and the Bamian Pass, all meeting about Kabul and Jalalabad; and finally the western comprising the roads leading from Persia and the Caspian by Herat or Birjind on Kandahar and the lower Indus. Of these he considered the eastern to be least important, and the western, though easiest yet longest and debouching at one end on a desert line backed by the Indus. The central group had the shortest and most direct routes between the two empires; but these had to cross a double chain of mountains and difficult passes before emerging on India.

Lord Lytton then emphasised the importance of a "vigorous offensive" as an essential of defence for which an effective "line of contact with Russia must be chosen." On all these grounds he considered the "triangle formed by Cabul, Ghuznee and Jalalabad with the possession of the passes over the Hindu Kush" to be immensely important for India. He wrote: "defensively, this position, entrenched behind a rampart of mountains, and with its communications unassailable, directly commands the central group of roads, while indirectly threatening both the eastern and western group. Offensively, it gives the power of debouching at will on the plains of the Oxus, and threatens every point of Russia's extended frontier. It is difficult to imagine a more commanding strategical position; and whenever

the moment of collision with Russia arrives it must find us in possession of it, as friends and allies of the Afghan if possible, but firmly established there in any case.”¹

Lord Lytton further examined the central group of roads and the strategic position of Herat and held that “as a purely military line, the strongest frontier we could take up would be along the Hindu Kush from the Pamir to Bamian, holding the northern debouches of the principal passes; and thence southwards by the Helmund, Girishk, and Candahar to the Arabian Sea. Though political considerations of the moment may compel and justify an extension of our line to the northern frontier of Afghanistan, this would weaken rather than strengthen our general position. But the political and strategical importance of Herat is so great that, though it lies beyond our natural frontier, it cannot be excluded from our line of defence. This line, therefore, should ultimately run from the Hindu Kush along the Paropamissus to Herat, and thence down the western frontier of Afghanistan and Baloochistan to the Arabian Sea.” After fixing on this line of defence and premising that Russia and England were drawing nearer to each other in Asia, the Viceroy then considered the measures essential to secure the “points necessary to the safety of India.” In this connection, he analysed the whole course of relations with Afghanistan and the agreements or arrangements with Russia, and brought out his view that the first object should be to “endeavour to re-establish such relations with the Ameer as will give us due influence in Afghanistan, and for ever exclude Russia therefrom . . . Failing in all efforts for this purpose, we shall have to take such steps as may be necessary to protect our own interests, irrespective of his, either by action in Afghanistan, or by direct arrangements with Russia, or both.”²

Sir Neville Chamberlain’s embassy was directed towards the first alternative. But Lord Lytton did not conceal his misgivings about the success of this course. Hence he contemplated “immediate steps for making the security of the north-western frontier independent” of the Amir. The measures to be adopted were the advance of a column to the head of the Kurram Valley and the assembling of a large force at Quetta, not for the purpose of invading Afghanistan which he deprecated particularly in view of the danger of Russia throwing herself into the strife on behalf of the Amir, but for exerting pressure on the Amir to bring him “to a truer sense of his interest, or to dethrone him and give an opportunity to the party which still

1 Minute, 4 Sept., 1878.

2 Ibid.

remains favourable to us at Cabul.”¹ On the Amir’s realising his situation and opening overtures he would be required to consent to the retention of a British force in the Kurram Valley and accept the terms previously proposed to him with necessary modifications. On his recalcitrance, negotiations would be opened with all tribes and parties in Afghanistan hostile to him which would lead to the complete break-up of his kingdom. The candidate, who would then be placed on the throne, would “secure the whole of Southern and Western Afghanistan” and would have to agree to the British hold over Kurram and the location of their representatives at Kabul, Kandahar and Herat. Yet for fear of being involved in a conflict with Russia, Lord Lytton did not visualise at the moment any action farther than strengthening the position in the Kurram Valley and detaching the neighbouring tribes from the Amir’s cause.

This minute was penned before Lord Lytton was sanguine of the imminence of war. But it clearly expounds the basis of his entire Central Asian policy. As against Russia, and that was the only danger to the expansion of the British imperial interests, the best means of defence for India, according to his school of thought, was to hold the strategic line of the Hindu Kush and have control over the triangle formed by Herat, Kandahar and Kabul; and as the second line of defence to guard the three routes of Khyber, Kurram and Bolan penetrating into India by having military outposts in those regions. It was not a visionary scheme born of morbid imagination, for in later decades it had come to be a well-established strategy of the defence of India. However, all we are concerned with here at this stage is to note that before the war actually came about, Lord Lytton did not contemplate more than the occupation of the Kurram Valley and control over the tribes in that region as the objects of his future policy towards Kabul. A friendly ruler subordinate to the wishes of the Government of India, with British representatives at his principal towns and influence over his foreign relations as a corollary to the protection afforded to him against external aggression and internal insurrection, and important military position in the Kurram Valley and at Quetta together with friendly influence over the tribes on the north-west frontier of India, these were the only objects which governed Lord Lytton’s policy in the early stages. And even when war had progressed somewhat, we find little advancement from this line. The fear of Russia, the hope of finding a friendly ruler, the anxiety not to rouse the hostility of the Afghan people,—for he observed a distinction in the early

1 Minute, 4 Sept., 1878.

days between the people and their Amir,—and the improbability of securing the countenance of the British Government to any extreme measures, were factors responsible for this moderation.

The war met with early success and Amir Sher Ali, beguiled by expectations of support from Russia, left his capital without organizing effective opposition to the British-Indian invasion, and proceeded towards Tashkand ostensibly for the purpose of seeking the intervention of the Czar in his dispute with England. The Indian forces had in the interval occupied the Khyber Pass as far as Dakka, and Jalalabad, the Kurram Valley and Pishin and Kandahar, and dispersed the Afghan troops. Originally the war had started with the object of merely avenging the insult offered by the Amir and punishing him for the affront, besides ensuring "the permanent security of our north-western frontier." The first object of retrieving British honour had been attained by the end of 1878. Lord Lytton and his Government then considered the measures by which the permanent security of the frontier would be achieved. In his minute of 15th January, 1879,¹ he discussed the problem and most emphatically repudiated either the necessity or the wisdom of pushing further the military machine in the direction of Herat, Ghazni or Kabul. As regards Kabul, his view was that the temporary occupation of Jalalabad and the military control of the positions in the Kurram Valley would afford necessary mastery over Kabul, hence no further advance against that town was desirable. The occupation of Bamian also he rejected because Russia had abstained from active intervention and the hold over the Kurram would enable "the most direct line of advance to Bamian and the passes of the Hindu Kush," if ever that course became inevitable. Thus, what he proposed was no further advance but to reduce the force on the Kandahar line and continue in existing strength to hold all other points until the situation in Kabul had crystallised. As the basis for future settlement, his view was that "the three gateways between India and Afghanistan," then in occupation, should never be surrendered. The territories which were then desired to be detached from the ruler of Kabul, were Pishin and Sibi on the Kandahar side, and Peiwar Kotal, and the Kurram Valley, excluding Khost, in the central area. Kandahar itself was to be restored. On the Khyber side, he wished to restore Jalalabad in view of the altered situation, but he emphasised the absolute necessity of withdrawing the Khyber tribes permanently from the control of Kabul and by acknowledging their independence to have

1 Secret (Supplementary) Jan., 1879, No. 500, K.W. No. 3,

direct relations with them. For that purpose "an advanced position somewhere on the other side of the pass" preferably Dakka was to be secured. In addition, Lord Lytton considered the political conditions "for a satisfactory resettlement of our relations" with Kabul and reiterated these as being "the permanent exclusion of all foreign agents, other than British, from Afghanistan, and the admission of British agents when and where necessary."¹

Amir Sher Ali was unable to get any help from Russia and he was dissuaded from going into the Russian territory. Disappointed and disconcerted, he died on 21st February, 1879, at Mazar-i-Sherif, leaving Afghanistan for settlement to the Viceroy of India. This new development made reconstruction of his plans necessary, and the vision of a disintegrated Afghanistan flashed at the moment, but for the time being we find Lord Lytton still endeavouring to have a united kingdom with British agents established therein. The news of the death of the Amir was communicated to the Viceroy by his son, Yakub Khan who was in command of the country and who intimated his wish for British friendship.² The terms which were offered to him were in line with the proposals contained in Lord Lytton's minute referred to above, and included "renunciation by the new Amir of all authority over the Khyber and Micheri Passes and the independent frontier tribes and the cession of Kurram, Pishin, and Sibi to the British. The foreign affairs of Afghanistan were to be conducted in accordance with the advice and wishes of the British Government and British officers were to be accredited to Kabul." The other stipulations related to assistance to the Amir in money, arms and troops against unprovoked external aggression, annual subsidy of Rs. 6 lacs, and facilities for British trade and telegraph communications in Afghanistan.³ Yakub Khan had to submit to these terms and the Treaty of Gandamak incorporating them was signed on 26th May, 1879, thus bringing to a happy consummation the policies and projects of Lord Lytton, which owing to his indiscreet and impolitic mode of action had necessitated recourse to warlike measures. Yet Gandamak gave the appearance of a lasting settlement, for Amir Yakub Khan was pleased with the treaty which, apart from the cession of territory, did not radically depart from the terms offered to his father and which with certain limitations, the latter was prepared to accept. But Lord Lytton had been counting without the host; for not long after

1 Secret Supplementary Proceedings, Jan., 1879, No. 500, K.W, No. 3.

2 Noyce, pp. 102-3

3 Ibid.

the establishment of Sir Louis Cavagnari's mission in Kabul, the storm broke out in all its fury, massacring the British officers and throwing the country once again into the turmoils of a new war. Lord Lytton had the pretence of fighting the Amir and being friendly to the people in 1878, but a year later he had to face the hostility of the people themselves, who were not prepared to brook any fetters on their freedom and who saw in the presence of British officers in their capital, and their haughty behaviour, the symptoms of their slavery. The new war, therefore, had to be bitter and involved the invasion of the country. In this new situation, Lord Lytton's dream of disintegrating the country and controlling it absolutely by carving it into a multiplicity of principalities, which had slumbered so long, revived.

When General Roberts had captured Kabul and Indian forces had occupied Kandahar and other strategic points, Yakub Khan "declared his resolution to resign the government of Afghanistan," and ultimately the Viceroy accepted this renunciation.¹ Kabul was taken over under his direct administration by General Roberts and Kandahar was governed by General Stewart through the agency of Sher Ali Khan, who was appointed Governor there.² In Kabul the fort of Bala Hisar was destroyed, suspected persons were imprisoned and a fine was imposed on the people for their action in massacring the unwanted British officers.³ Yet that was not a permanent measure, and plans for the resettlement of that country were being considered. The Secretary of State, in his despatch of 11th December, 1879, asked for the views of the Government of India "in regard to the reorganization and administration of Afghanistan," and in this connection expressed the apprehension of Her Majesty's Government "that there is no chance of the establishment of one Government for the whole of the late kingdom which would give promise of permanence." He desired such arrangements to be considered as "will reconcile the interests of the Afghan chiefs and people with the essential condition of security to the British Empire in India."⁴

Very soon after, the Government of India outlined their first plans for the resettlement of Afghanistan consequent on its disintegration. In their despatch No. 3 of 7th January, 1880,⁵ they

1 Despatch to Secretary of State, No. 224, 23 Oct., 1879, Afghanistan (1880) No. 1, p. 133

2 Despatch to Secretary of State, No. 231, 6 Nov., 1879, Ibid. p. 149

3 Telegram, 13 Nov., 1879 from General Roberts. Also other papers in Afghanistan (1880) No. 1.

4 Despatch from Secretary of State, No. 49, 11 Dec., 1879, Afghanistan (1880) No. 1, p. 168

5 Afghan Correspondence, (1881) No. 1, pp. 4-7

definitely proposed the creation of two distinct states of Kabul and Kandahar and the cession of Herat and Seistan provinces to Persia. Such a contingency had become inevitable owing to the absence of any strong ruler in Afghanistan who could collect together the various elements of a heterogeneous population, so greatly inspired by sectionalism, and remain amenable to British influence. But apart from this difficulty, Lord Lytton's views and projects of imperial defence also pointed to the division of the country. The failure of his policy with Amir Sher Ali and the rapid dissolution of the settlement of Gandamak, made him definitely convinced of the wisdom of the policy of disintegration as an effective means of securing British control in a region so strategically important for the security of the British Empire in India. The Government of India wrote: "The Treaty of Gandamak represented a final endeavour to bring into effect the policy of maintaining on our frontier a strong and independent kingdom with a foreign policy exclusively subordinate to British direction, a national unity relying upon the British Government for support against external aggression, and a commercial system connected with India by a natural community of interests." They pointed out that all their efforts to accomplish this object by aiding Amir Sher Ali and by entering into a treaty with his son Amir Yakub Khan, had ended in disappointment, and remarked that "the kingdom laboriously recovered by Sher Ali, has fallen to pieces at the first blow; and it would now be a difficult if not impracticable task, even were it politically desirable, to reunite these fragments under any single ruler." They further remarked that the absorption of the various Afghan principalities into one kingdom "represented only a temporary, and to some degree an accidental, phase of their recent political history." But that it had dissolved again and the "provinces are left disconnected and masterless, any attempt to reconstitute them under one Government would commit us to a course of military and political interference which would certainly entangle us in great and protracted difficulties, and would end, as we believe, in failure." Hence the Government of India accepted, as the basis of their policy, "the separation of its constituent provinces," and "maintaining a dominant influence over those provinces which form the out-works of our Indian Empire," but desired to avoid territorial annexations or considerable "interference in their internal affairs."¹

On this basis, the Government of India desired to retain the line of military frontier which had been secured by the Treaty

¹ Despatch No. 3, 7 Jan., 1880.

of Gandamak and had no wish to part with the districts of Pishin, Sibi and Kurram. For the remaining territories of Afghanistan, their plan was, firstly, to permit Persia to occupy Herat provisionally "under sufficient guarantees for her good administration of it, and for her adequate protection of British and Indian interests at that point, and with a special reservation of our right to occupy the place with British forces in certain eventualities;" secondly, to give away Seistan along with the province of Herat to Persia, thirdly, "to establish the province of Kandahar as an independent and separate State, under an hereditary ruler selected from the representatives of the old ruling families;" and lastly, to have a separate state of Kabul with its "internal administration" under "a Native ruler in subordinate alliance with ourselves, supported and controlled by a strong British cantonment established at some point." To this Kabul Government were to be given the Oxus provinces "nominally subject to the Kabul Governor, though enjoying practical independence." A British garrison was to be maintained at or near Kandahar also for the purpose of maintaining "our due influence in Western Afghanistan," and a railway line was to be pushed up to Kandahar, and Persia was to be influenced to extend it to Herat. By this means, the protection of Herat and the maintenance of British influence there were to be safeguarded.¹ These were the new objects of the Government of India and action soon proceeded on these lines. The moderation of Lord Lytton's Government may be explained by the attitude of Russia, which had abstained from interference, and the realisation of the danger of continued military occupation in a country which had demonstrated more than once its intractable hostility to foreign rule. Yet the Government of India had made it clear that they would not hesitate to stay on in Kabul "if the Oxus provinces are entered, or seriously threatened by a foreign Power, and indeed any political interference from beyond the Oxus would unavoidably embarrass our plans for the evacuation of Kabul."²

The confusion in Afghanistan had been further accentuated by the pretensions to independence of Mir Shahzada Hassan in Badakshan, the invasion and occupation of Herat by Ayub Khan, the brother of Amir Yakub Khan, and the entry of Abdur Rahman Khan into Afghan Turkistan in the north. The revolt in Badakshan was suppressed by Abdur Rahman who had defeated Mir Shahzada Hassan and had thus brought the whole of the northern territories under his

¹ Despatch No. 3, 7 Jan., 1880.

² Despatch No. 3, 7 Jan., 1880, para. 13.

control.¹ The Government of India had been watching the movements of this prince and had been inclined to accept him as the ruler of Kabul if he would submit to their terms. On 14th March, 1880, the Viceroy telegraphed to the Secretary of State emphasising the necessity of finding, "without delay, some Native authority, to which we can restore Northern Afghanistan, without risk of immediate anarchy, on our evacuation of Kabul," and advocated "early public recognition of Abdur Rahman as legitimate heir of Dost Mahomed."² This was agreed to by the Secretary of State readily³ and steps were taken to implement it. The proposals regarding Herat were not given effect to immediately as the situation had changed, but negotiations had been opened by Ayub Khan who was trying to secure British acknowledgement of his title. Moreover, the railway was believed to afford means of controlling Herat from Kandahar, and hence early settlement was not a pressing problem.

Meanwhile, Sher Ali Khan had been recognised ruler of Kandahar, and on 13th March, 1880, the Viceroy had given him a letter announcing his recognition "as independent ruler of the province of Kandahar" and stipulating for the location of a British force in a cantonment at or near the city of Kandahar and allotment of a portion of the grain revenue of the state for the provision of supplies for these troops. "A special officer of rank" was to "be deputed to reside in the cantonment as a medium of friendly communication, and to conduct the relations of the British Government with the States upon the frontiers of your Highness' territory." "Upon this understanding," it was laid down, "the government will remain entirely in the hands of your Highness under the protection of the great Government of England."⁴ Sher Ali Khan agreed to accept this position and he was assured of aid in money and material "if it should be required to consolidate or extend his rule in the interests of Her Majesty's Indian Empire."⁵ The Government of India were, therefore, in a position to write on 7th April, 1880, that "the separation of Kandahar from Kabul is therefore an accomplished fact, and the independence of Sher Ali Khan has been solemnly guaranteed."⁶

1 Telegram from Viceroy to Secretary of State, 17 March, 1880, also Telegram, 11 Feb., 1880, Afghanistan (1881) No. 1, pp. 8-9

2 Telegram from Viceroy to Secretary of State, 14 March, 1880, Afghanistan (1881) No. 1, p. 9

3 Telegram from Secretary of State, 18 March, 1880, *ibid.*

4 Letter to Sher Ali Khan, 13 March, 1880. Afghanistan (1881) No. 1 pp. 12-13

5 Despatch to Secretary of State, No. 90, 7 April, 1880, para. 2 Afghanistan (1881) No. 1, p. 14.

6 *Ibid.*

Abdur Rahman Khan had opened negotiations with the British military authorities in Kabul and had expressed his willingness for a friendly arrangement with the Government of India, provided that in so doing he should not give the appearance of being unfaithful to Russia.¹ The Government of India had resolved upon withdrawal from Kabul before October 1880, and were only waiting for some settled government to be established in Kabul, before commencing evacuation. It has been mentioned earlier that Her Majesty's Government and the Government of India were prepared to accept Abdur Rahman Khan for he gave indications of being able to establish a strong government and appeared to be popular with the majority of the population. It is also clear that subsequent to the separation of Kandahar as an independent state and the firm resolve to retain the territorial gains by the Treaty of Gandamak in 1878, the Government of India was not interested in imposing conditions on, or extracting guarantees from, Abdur Rahman Khan or any other ruler of Kabul in lieu of his recognition. Lord Lytton outlined his political objects on 30th March, 1880 thus : "The Government is anxious to withdraw as soon as possible the troops from Kabul, and from all points beyond those to be occupied under the Treaty of Gandamak, except Kandahar, In order that this may be done, it is desirable to find a ruler for Kabul, which will be separated from Kandahar."² A few days later on 27th April, 1880, this policy was further enunciated and fully elaborated upon by the Foreign Secretary to the Government of India in his communication to Mr. Lepel Griffin, Chief Political Officer in Kabul, who was charged with the negotiations with Abdur Rahman Khan.³

This document commenced with the exposition of the main object of policy towards Afghanistan which was declared to be the "security of the north-west frontier of India," which was believed to be "incompatible with the intrusion of any foreign influence into the great border State of Afghanistan." To exclude that influence has been the chief purpose of India's relations with the ruler of Kabul, whether in subsidizing him or in fighting him. But the endeavour had always been to base the security of the frontier on the friendship and strength of the rulers of Kabul. But owing to the failure of this method,

1 Text of the letter of Abdur Rahman Khan in Telegram, dated 22 April, 1880 from Lepel Griffin to Foreign Secretary. *Afghanistan* (1881) No. 1, p. 22.

2 Minute by the Viceroy dated 30 March, 1880, *Afghanistan* (1881) No. 1, p. 15.

3 No. 1491 E.P., 27 April, 1880, Lyall to Griffin. *Afghanistan* (1881) No. 1 pp. 24-25

it was stated, "we were compelled to seek the attainment of the object . . . by rendering the permanent security of our frontier as much as possible independent of such conditions." For the interests of the Government of India should not be "imperilled by further adhesion to a policy dependent for its fruition on the gratitude, the good faith, the assumed self-interest, or the personal character of any Afghan prince." Next, Lyall, the Foreign Secretary, adverted to the object of invading Kabul, and opined that both the objects, viz., punishment of crime and maintenance of safeguards by separating Kandahar from Kabul had been attained. Hence, "the Government of India has no longer any motive or desire to enter into fresh treaty engagements with the rulers of Kabul," because firstly, the earlier attempts in that direction had resulted in frustration, and secondly, the situation had radically altered. In this connection Lyall wrote: "Our advanced frontier positions at Kandahar and Kurram have materially diminished the political importance of Kabul in relation to India; and although we shall always appreciate the friendship of its ruler, our relations with him are now of so little importance to the paramount objects of our policy that we no longer require to maintain British Agents in any part of his dominions."¹ This was a notable departure from Lord Lytton's earlier policy which had involved him in war.

The important point, however, was that of the basis of negotiations with Abdur Rahman Khan, who had suggested "permanent establishment of Afghanistan with our assistance and sympathy under the joint protection of the British and Russian empires."² This suggestion it was impossible to entertain for the primary object of the Government of India had been "the exclusion of foreign influence or interference from Afghanistan," and Russia had declared her intention to regard Afghanistan as lying outside her sphere of influence. Hence Abdur Rahman Khan was to be unequivocally informed "that the relations of Afghanistan to the British and Russian empires are matters which the Government of India must decline to bring into discussion with the Sirdar." It was further added: "The Afghan States and tribes are too contiguous with India, whose north-western frontier they surround, for the Government of India ever willingly to accept partnership with any other Power in the exercise of its legitimate and recognized influence over those tribes and states." Hence, there was no question of joint control, but Abdur Rahman Khan might adhere to "the international duty of scrupulously respecting all

1 Lyall to Griffin, 27 April, 1880.

2 Ibid., para. 13.

the recognized rights and interests of their Russian neighbour; refraining from every act calculated to afford the Russian authorities in Central Asia any just cause of umbrage or complaint.”¹ The basis of his friendship with the British was therefore to be the exclusion of all control or influence by Russia on him. On that condition “our own friendship will, if sincerely sought, be freely given, and fully continued so long as it is loyally reciprocated. But we attach to it no other condition. We have no concession to ask or make.”² Abdur Rahman Khan was also to be given to understand that he must accept Kabul without Kandahar or the Kurram districts and even Herat. Kabul would be evacuated and here his convenience would be consulted. The government of his country was to be transferred to him unconditionally and it was stated that “if Abdur Rahman proves able and disposed to conciliate the confidence of his countrymen, without forfeiting the good understanding which he seeks with us, he will assuredly find his best support in our political appreciation of that fact.”³ Thus was the gulf to be bridged between the policy which had led to war and the resettlement of Afghanistan on the basis of permanent security of the north-western frontier of India.

Even before Lord Lytton had left India and the Government in England had changed, certain broad lines of future policy had been clearly defined. The experience of war and the too apparent hostility of the Afghan people to foreign domination had convinced even Lord Lytton's Government of the unwisdom of a prolonged military occupation of that country and the permanent establishment of a British mission controlling the policies of the ruler in Kabul. The decision to evacuate Kabul had therefore been taken; only its time was to synchronise with the semblance of stable authority in northern Afghanistan. The arrangement regarding Herat which was contemplated by Lord Lytton had also fallen through for the negotiations with Persia proved fruitless, and the conviction was growing that that distant province, long regarded as the most important strategic outpost of India, should be incorporated with the principality of Kabul. Of course, to cover his trails, Lord Lytton had adhered to his past theory of a separate western Khanate, and had before his departure installed Sher Ali Khan as the Wali of Kandahar, but both the character as well as the critical situation of this prince made his hold precarious. Lord Lytton had also opened negotiations with Abdur Rahman Khan who was

1 Lyall to Griffin, 27 April, 1880, paras. 16-17.

2 Ibid., para. 10.

3 Ibid., para. 26.

to be accepted as ruler of Kabul only, but with him no conditions were to be made. Thus the framework of a policy had been outlined, but the new Government, more inclined to the pacific views of Lord Lawrence and with more realistic conceptions of the security of India, was prepared to depart from it and showed its willingness to reverse the basic elements of Lord Lytton's policy.

Lord Hartington was the new Secretary of State and Lord Ripon the new Viceroy of India, who directed the policy and laid the foundations of friendly relations with Afghanistan which subsisted long. In his despatch of 21st May, 1880, the Secretary of State enunciated his views on Afghan policy, and though leaving its implementation to the discretion of the Viceroy and his Government in India, in the light of the situation here, he laid down the general lines of conduct. Starting with an analysis of the military involvement in Afghanistan and its effect on Indian finances and the morale of the forces, as well as the actual output of all the sacrifices, Lord Hartington came to the conclusion that the only result of their interference had been the destruction of the previously existing government and the absence of any authority "except that of independent chiefs over the various tribes," and no control whatsoever over the country beyond the positions occupied by British Indian troops. There was no certainty, in such a situation, that "a renewed combination of those tribes against us may not recur at any moment, and that we may not be again compelled to defend positions which we hold." He further argued against the practicability of the military occupation of the whole country, for that would afford no prospect of permanent order and security. The only alternative, therefore, was prompt evacuation and "the conclusion of arrangements which offer any hope of re-establishing a settled Government." He then adverted to the arrangements set on foot by Lord Lytton and pithily remarked: "Thus it appears that, as the result of two successful campaigns, of the employment of an enormous force, and of the expenditure of large sums of money, all that has yet been accomplished has been the disintegration of the State, which it was desired to see strong, friendly, and independent, the assumption of fresh and unwelcome liabilities in regard to one of its provinces, and a condition of anarchy throughout the remainder of the country."

Lord Hartington then proceeded to consider how far it was necessary "to acquiesce in the continuance of this position of affairs," and desired the Viceroy to scrutinise the character of the engagements already entered into as a preliminary to a

change of policy. Her Majesty's Government had only two objects then, one, to withdraw a large part of the force engaged in Afghanistan, and two, "to see the restoration on our north-western frontier of a friendly state capable of maintaining its own independence, and administering its own affairs without the military support of the British Government." In this connection the Secretary of State hinted his reluctance to adhere to the arrangement regarding Kandahar and was prepared to get out of it, if it was consistent with the faith of the British Government. He desired the Viceroy to examine the whole question of Kandahar. As regards Kabul, in view of the inconclusive negotiations with Abdur Rahman Khan, he considered Her Majesty's Government "free to adopt whatever line of policy may ultimately be deemed best suited to attain the objects which the Government of India have professedly had in view, namely, the restoration of order in Afghanistan, and the peace and security of the British frontier." Lord Hartington then defined the course of action. First, he desired the Afghan territory to be evacuated "whenever it appears possible to entertain the hope that the prospect of a stable government has been secured." And because, according to Lord Lytton, the western part of Afghanistan alone was essential for India's security, the evacuation of Kabul might be immediate and there Abdur Rahman Khan might be established "with as little direct assistance from Her Majesty's agents or troops as possible, and to give him to understand that he must rely on his own resources." The Secretary of State had no intention to embarrass the new ruler with the presence of British officers in his country, which was the basic cause of rupture with Amir Sher Ali. Lord Hartington wrote: "It would, in the opinion of Her Majesty's Government, be undesirable to embarrass him, and to commit ourselves to the possible necessity of further interference, by insisting on his receiving a British Resident. On the other hand, a Native envoy would probably be of assistance to him in maintaining his authority, and would supply the Indian Government with all necessary information.

Secondly, the Secretary of State emphasised the arguments against the separation of Kandahar, and wrote, "it must, therefore, be regarded as almost certain that a policy of separation will be found to involve the necessity of affording permanent military support to the ruler of Kandahar, a liability to which Her Majesty's Government would entertain the greatest objection." Thirdly, Lord Hartington desired that, in the case of Abdur Rahman Khan not being amenable as ruler of Kabul, Yakub Khan might be considered again for the Govern-

ment of Afghanistan. Fourthly, about Herat, he stressed the desirability of its forming "part of an united kingdom of Afghanistan," as its position "constitutes one of the most serious objections to the disintegration of Afghanistan," for with an independent chief there "it would be practically almost impossible for the British Government to exercise any control or influence over his policy." Fifthly, the Secretary of State doubted the value "of maintaining the advanced military positions" in the Pishin, Kurram and Khyber areas as acquired by the Treaty of Gandamak, and desired the Viceroy to consider this question wholly "upon military considerations." The other important point of policy laid down by Lord Hartington related to the assistance to the new ruler of Afghanistan against external attack. In this connection he wrote, "Her Majesty's Government are prepared to renew the assurances which were offered in 1873 by Lord Northbrook to the Amir, to the effect that, upon certain conditions he might rely on the support of the British Government against unprovoked aggression; but they are unable in any degree to extend them, or to assume undefined liabilities in regard to the foreign policy of a Government the character of which must necessarily be at present so uncertain."¹ These were the lines on which Lord Ripon was authorised to effect the resettlement of Afghanistan, though latitude in the matter of detail was allowed to him. It is evident from this exposition of British policy that in every aspect it was directed towards the reversal of Lord Lytton's action and reversion to the stage of smooth and friendly relations achieved before the adoption of an adventurous forward policy.

It is unnecessary here to trace the course of negotiations with Abdur Rahman Khan. However, it may be mentioned that before committing himself that Chief desired to know the extent of the boundaries to be left to him and whether a British envoy would be inflicted on him, as also the obligations imposed on him and the benefits he might expect from the British.² The reply which Mr. Griffin was authorised to send on 14th June met with his approval and formed the basis of future relations between Afghanistan and India. He was informed "with regard to the position of the ruler of Kabul to foreign Powers, since the British Government admit no right of interference by foreign Powers in Afghanistan, and since both Russia and Persia are pledged to abstain from all interference with Afghan affairs,

¹ Despatch from Secretary of State, No. 23, dated 21 May, 1880. Afghanistan (1881) No. 1, pp. 29-33

² Abdur Rahman Khan to Griffin, 16 May, 1880, *ibid.*, p. 47
p. 47

it is plain that the Kabul ruler can have no political relations with any foreign Power except the English; and if any such foreign Power should attempt to interfere in Afghanistan, and if such interference should lead to unprovoked aggression on the Kabul ruler, then the British Government will be prepared to aid him, if necessary, to repel it, provided that he follows the advice of the British Government in regard to his external relations." He was also told that except for Kandahar or the frontier territories assigned by the Treaty of Gandamak, the whole of Afghanistan, including Herat, whose possession the British Government did not guarantee, would form part of his dominions. And it was added, "The British Government desires to exercise no interference in your internal government of these territories, nor will you be required to admit an English Resident anywhere; although, for convenience of ordinary friendly intercourse between two contiguous states, it may be advisable to station, by agreement, a Muhammadan Agent of the British Government at Kabul." These would be committed to "formal writing" on his accepting the invitation to be ruler of Kabul.¹ Abdur Rahman Khan replied on 22nd June and accepted the terms contained in the letter.² From this acceptance to his actual proclamation as Amir of Kabul was not a long process, though at certain stages serious doubts of his integrity were entertained. However, ultimately on 22nd July, he was recognised as ruler of Kabul at a Darbar held at Charikar, and his recognition as well as the terms defining his relationship with the Government of India were incorporated in a letter communicated to him.³ Subsequently Kabul was handed over to him and the British troops retired to India.

The next problem was about the occupation of positions in the Khyber and Kurram areas, places which had been acquired by the Treaty of Gandamak and which Lord Lytton's Government had considered extremely important for the security of the north-west frontier. Lord Hartington had desired, in his despatch of 21st May, that the Government of India should reconsider this matter. On mature consideration and strengthened by the advice of their military advisers, Lord Ripon's Government decided that the garrisons in the Khyber Pass at Lundi Kotal and Ali Masjid would "withdraw across the

1 Griffin to Abdur Rahman Khan, 14 June, 1880, *Afghanistan* (1881) No. 1, pp. 47-8

2 Abdur Rahman Khan to Griffin, 22 June, 1880. *Ibid.* p. 48

3 Despatch to Secretary of State, No. 166, dated 27th July, 1880.

This despatch describes fully the course of negotiations leading to the declaration of Abdur Rahman Khan as Amir of Kabul.

Also Griffin to Stewart, No. 62 S.P.C., 4 Aug., 1880.

frontier of British India," and that the security of the Pass and communication thereby should be entrusted to the tribes with whom arrangements would be made. These were to be on the basis of recognising their independence and the condition "that the pass shall remain under their independent and exclusive charge and shall be kept by them open and free from interference." As long as these conditions were fulfilled, no troops would be stationed by the Indian authorities there, and it would be made plain "that no other regular troops will be permitted, without the consent of the British Government, to occupy posts in the Khyber."¹ Thus the Afridis were to be left free to hold the Pass and be in friendly intercourse with the Government of India. Similar was the decision regarding positions in the Kurram Valley, the chief of which was the garrison at Peiwar Kotal. The consensus of opinion in this case also was "against our permanent retention of any military positions in the Kurram district." Even General Roberts did not consider their strategic importance in the event of a war with Afghanistan sufficiently great to justify the stationing of garrisons there. He adhered to the line of advance on the southern side, towards Kandahar, and advocated a mere defensive position on the north-west frontier. Hence Lord Ripon decided on withdrawal from the Kurram also, but made arrangements that the Turi tribe would be made independent and be "maintained against any interference from Kabul, without attempting to select for them a Governor, or to impose a government upon them against their expressed will." The tribe was warned to avoid disputes with Kabul and to "comply with the wishes of the British Government in matters affecting the tranquillity of the frontier." The other two tribes Jajis and Hairobs were allowed to go back to their semi-allegiance to the Amir of Kabul who was informed accordingly.²

The decision to leave forward positions in the Khyber and Kurram had been occasioned by the policy of withdrawing altogether from northern Afghanistan, for thereby the value of these posts in the tribal territory as strategic points on the line of communication had ceased. They became in that contingency mere forward positions, like islands in a hostile tribal territory, whose maintenance and retention would involve considerable military effort and disproportionate strain. Therefore, the policy of political arrangement with the tribes for the security of trade routes was to be resorted to. Lord Lytton had been influenced by military considerations of meeting an enemy in

1 Despatch to Secretary of State, No. 208, 14 Sept., 1880

2 Ibid.

the interior of Afghanistan in deciding to annex these districts. Lord Ripon had no such apprehensions of Russian invasion and had no desire to go to war with Afghanistan again. This was the reason for the new step. But it is problematical if, in view of the future developments in the tribal area and large drain of men and money in settling our frontier on a stable basis, the policy of Lord Ripon's Government was not merely opportunist and unwise from a long view of things. The military advisers, chiefly General Roberts and Haines, had given their assent to this course on the clear stipulation that Kandahar was held in force and its retention was adhered to as necessary for controlling the Amir of Kabul's foreign policy and for insuring "an effective advance from the southward against an enemy in the interior of the country."¹ However, the Government of India was then in a mood to withdraw and retire within its cowl again, a reversion to the policy of Lord Lawrence and Lord Northbrook.

The other important problem was that of Kandahar. As early as 21st May, 1880, Lord Hartington had prognosticated the eventual restoration of Kandahar to the ruler of Kabul and had asked the Government of India to examine the character of the undertakings given to Sher Ali Khan, the Wali of Kandahar.² The new Government had, therefore, visualised the unity of Afghanistan, though it was prevented from implementing it immediately owing to the *fait accompli* and pledges given by Lord Lytton to the ruler of Kandahar. However, not long after, events smoothed the process towards the new objective. Ayub Khan invaded Kandahar; the British forces had an early reverse at Maiwand and the city of Kandahar was besieged. Sher Ali Khan had proved his incapacity and weakness to hold his power, and his unpopularity had been clearly demonstrated. When therefore Ayub Khan had been driven back and Kandahar made secure, Sher Ali Khan, realising his position, had desired to resign his office and retire to Karachi as a British stipendiary.³ All pledges given to him earlier, thus, came automatically to an end, and the British Government had a clean slate to write out the future settlement of southern Afghanistan. The alternative was between permanent occupation or even annexation of Kandahar to the Indian territories and transferring it to Amir Abdur Rahman, if he should give promise of establishing

¹ See Enclosures to Despatch, 14 Sept., 1880, No. 25 in Afghanistan (1880) No. 1, particularly Haines Minute, 7 Sept., 1880. (Enclosure 12) and Roberts to Lyall No. 11-kh, 29 May, 1880 (Encl. 3)

² Despatch from Secretary of State, 21 May, 1880. Op. cit.

³ Telegram from Viceroy to Secretary of State, 12 Nov., 1880. Afghanistan (1881) No. 1, p. 93

a strong rule and safeguarding British interests. Lord Hartington analysed clearly the whole position in his despatch of 11th November, 1880, and gave an indication of the policy of Her Majesty's Government. Their definite opinion was, and it was the basis of their plans about Kandahar, "that any measure which would make necessary a permanent military occupation of Kandahar would be considered by them as open to the gravest objection." The Secretary of State fortified this view by referring to the considerations which had prompted the creation of a separate state of Kandahar. That measure had been advocated not as an insurance against the tribes or people inhabiting that region, but only "as a measure of defence against some power far more formidable than any Afghan race." And he wrote that "it is both as to the existence of such a danger, and as to the expediency of this mode of resisting it, if it does exist, that it is deprecated." Lord Hartington further emphasised "that there exists no such danger or apprehension of danger to the security of India from possible foreign invasion as would justify the Government in taking measures which must certainly lead immediately to very heavy addition to their large military expenditure," as would be entailed in an occupation of Kandahar. He did not consider Russia's advance in Central Asia as a direct and immediate menace to India. He further dilated on the injurious "consequences of any interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan," and pointed out the absence of any strong military power in that country to resist the advance of the British army or occupation by it of any part of its territories. Yet he was not oblivious of the "difficulties of permanent occupation or of supporting by a military force any Government imposed on the people by the British power."¹

Her Majesty's Government not only deprecated military occupation in the garb of supporting an unpopular ruler, but were also opposed to the annexation of Kandahar as it would involve maintaining a large force there and would be contrary to the declarations made before the war. The Secretary of State added: "They hold that nothing but the most imperative necessity of self-preservation would justify them, after such declarations, in the annexation, against the will of the people of Afghan territory. Attempts have been made to prove that the rule of the British Government would be willingly accepted by the inhabitants of Kandahar; but it is admitted by almost all those who are most competent to form an opinion, that the mass of the inhabitants of the territory which it would be necessary

1 Despatch from the Secretary of State, No. 45, 11 Nov., 1880.

to annex would be bitterly opposed to the loss of their independence, and to the Government of a power alien in race and religion." Lord Hartington also felt that even the annexation of Kandahar would give no rest, for impatient forwardists would not be satisfied till the advance had been pushed farther and farther, and in this connection quoted Lord Lytton's despatch of 7th July, 1879, "that the strategic value of Kandahar exists only in connection with a system of frontier defence, much more extensive than any we now require or have ever contemplated." Hence, Her Majesty's Government had no desire to chase the mirage, and decided to leave Kandahar and Herat to Amir Abdur Rahman Khan if he would easily take over their administration, or otherwise "as in the case of Kabul, having assisted in the establishment of that form of government which appears to offer the best prospects of permanence and to be most in conformity with the wishes of the people, the Government of India should make it clearly understood that the future ruler should be left to rely on his own resources, and that it is not their intention to interfere further in the internal affairs of Afghanistan in a manner which would involve the employment of Her Majesty's forces beyond the frontier." Lord Hartington believed rightly that, admitting Kandahar's strategic importance, it would be easier to have military occupation "when an advance of some hostile power should have made it clear that not only the safety of India but the independence of Afghanistan is threatened," and opined that such an occupation would be more advantageous if effected "with the assent and good will of the Afghan people" than otherwise. His remarks about the Afghan desire for independence and their suspicion of the British are significant. He wrote, "If the Afghans have ever been disposed to look with more friendship on either their Russian or Persian than their British neighbour, it is not an unnatural result of the fear for the loss of their freedom which our past policy has been calculated to inspire. There is nothing in the character of the Afghan people which would lead to the belief that they would welcome invasion or subjection by any power whatever, and it appears to Her Majesty's Government not unreasonable to hope that a policy of complete withdrawal from Afghan territory, coupled with a steady abstinence from interference in their internal affairs, adopted after the signal vindication of our military superiority, will, if publicly announced and steadily adhered to, have the effect of converting these semi-civilized but brave tribes into useful allies of the British power."¹

¹ Despatch from Secretary of State, 11 Nov., 1880.

This despatch facilitated the settlement of Kandahar and its transfer to Amir Abdur Rahman. The Viceroy wrote to the Amir, on 30th January, 1881, offering to restore Kandahar to the dominions of Afghanistan and to extend his authority there and desired Amir Abdur Rahman to complete his preparations for the eventual take-over. Assistance similar to that afforded in Kabul was promised to him.¹ The Amir organised his forces with the aid given by the Government of India in money, rifles and ammunition, and, ultimately, before the end of the summer of 1881, Kandahar and Herat formed part of a united kingdom of Afghanistan. Ayub Khan was also warned to desist from creating disturbance, and not long after, he also retired to India. Thus was settled the problem of Kandahar, about which in military circles there was considerable difference of opinion, and views advocating its retention under British control, were not wanting. The only areas which continued to remain under British occupation were Pishin and Sibi, though Her Majesty's Government had desired evacuation of these places also. Lord Lytton's house of cards was ultimately demolished and the Government of India reverted to a policy which had been pursued not without success by his predecessors.

The final position which had emerged was that Amir Abdur Rahman had come into the possession of the whole of Afghanistan including Herat, Kandahar and Seistan, and was in a position to establish a strong government in the land of his grandfather, Amir Dost Muhammad. He was without adequate pecuniary resources, but the Government of India gave him a sum of more than 20 lacs of rupees, and made over to him artillery, rifles and ammunition to strengthen his hold over the country. Though immediately no permanent annual subsidy was promised to him, yet not long after, in 1883, a sum of rupees twelve lacs annually was settled on him.² The Amir was not burdened with a British embassy, for the experience of imposing one had not been happy, and the system of an Indian Agent at Kabul was again resorted to. The theory that the Amir could have no relations with any other power but the British was reiterated, and, though no formal treaty engagement was entered into, a letter which was later invested with the sanctity of a treaty was given to the Amir in which his obligations towards the British were clearly enunciated and the privileges which he might expect from them were outlined. This communication had the force of a legal stipulation but

¹ Viceroy to Amir, 30 Jan., 1881. *Afghanistan* (1881), No. 5, p. 30.

² Letter from Viceroy to Amir, 16 June, 1883. *Central Asia*, 1884 (1) p. 85

we gather from the autobiography of Amir Abdur Rahman that some doubts were entertained in some quarters as to its validity; hence the Government of India reiterated the declaration in 1883, which satisfied every party.¹ This declaration was couched in words similar to those of 1880, and, while denying to the Amir the liberty of political relations with foreign powers, pledged British assistance and support in case of alien interference leading to unprovoked aggression. Thus was established the convention that the foreign relations of Afghanistan would be subordinated to the wishes and advice of the Government of India, a consummation which, without being explicit, was inherent in the declarations made by Lord Mayo at Ambala or by Lord Northbrook at Simla. The vagueness and equivocalness of such an engagement before 1875 had occasioned misgivings and apprehensions on the part of the Amir and encouraged on the part of Lord Lytton feelings of distrust of the attitude of Amir Sher Ali. The declarations of 1880 and 1882, without differing substantially from the earlier ones, by leaving out the words relating to the discretion of the British Government, were more specific, and defined unequivocally the obligations of the two parties and thereby established their friendship on a more concrete foundation. Amir Abdur Rahman was satisfied with it, and depended for his own stability on British assistance which was not stinted. Lord Ripon had also reason to trust the new Amir and adopted a policy which strengthened the bonds of friendship, consolidated the government in Afghanistan and interposed a powerful barrier against any future intrusion of Russia.

The new Government of India in 1880, as also Her Majesty's Government, had no fear of Russian invasion which was not considered now even as a remote possibility. The interregnum of mutual hostility and threat had ceased and the British Government was in a mood again to open friendly negotiations with the court of St. Petersburg for the delimitation of frontiers between Russia and Afghanistan. Lord Granville, the Foreign Secretary of England, broached this question on February 2, 1882, in his conversations, with Prince Lobanov, the Russian Ambassador, and desired that the existing friendliness between the two countries should be utilised to come to some agreement "as regards the policy and position of the two Powers in Asia." The main points on which such an agreement was to be made were the settlement of the frontier between Persia and the Turkoman country to the point where the Persian frontier met that of Afghanistan and the frontier

¹ Letter from Viceroy to Amir, 22 Feb., 1883; also of 16 June, 1883.

between Afghanistan and Russia.¹ The two governments accepted the validity of the agreement between Prince Gortchakov and Lord Clarendon relating to the Afghan boundaries, but the problem of the frontier from Khoja Saleh to the north-western point on the Persian frontier was still left to be settled. The conversations culminated in an agreement which led to the appointment of a Commission for the actual delimitation of the frontier line.² The negotiations leading to it and the actual delimitation which at times even threatened war, lie beyond the scope of this monograph. Suffice it to say that the alacrity with which the Government of India sponsored the cause of the Amir or showed their willingness to fulfil the obligations of support against external aggression, reinforced mutual trust and made Afghanistan wholly align herself with India. This mutual friendship, depending upon a reciprocity of obligations and scrupulous regard for Afghan independence in their internal affairs, continued unabated, rather it grew from day to day, as long as the Forward Policy, once again occasioned by Russian expansion elsewhere in Asia, had not clouded the foreign policy of India and brought about distrust and coolness in the relations between the two neighbours for some time. However, in 1883, the relations were friendly, the Government of India was rendering assistance and scrupulously avoiding interference.

The settlement of Afghanistan had followed the pattern of Lord Lawrence's policy, and by its success fully belied the efficacy of Lord Lytton's recipe which had brought injury, and was destructive of the friendship and strength of a country which, policy and interest both demanded, should be strong, united and friendly to India. By the result Lord Northbrook was vindicated and Lord Lytton's policy, having its origin in extra-Indian interests of British policy, and having for its basis the opposition of Russia in Central Asia, stood deprecated.

1 Granville to Thornton, 2 Feb., 1882. Central Asia, No. 1 (1884), p. 2

2 Granville to Thornton, 22 Feb., 1882; March 14, 1882; March 22, 1882; April 22, 1882; Thornton to Granville, 29 April, 1882, etc., Central Asia, No. 1 (1884)

CHAPTER XIII

THE PERSIAN GULF AND THE ARAB LITTORAL

WE have so far examined Indo-British policy in Central Asia where it was brought into conflict with the expanding imperialism of Russia. Political interests pre-eminently determined the course and direction of the foreign policy of the Government of India. We may now turn to another region fringing the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea, where the dominating motive was commerce and the tension had its origin not in Russian hostility but in the possible commercial rivalry of the European powers or the likely claims of Turkey or Persia for suzerainty over the petty principalities under British influence. Trade, maritime supremacy on the highway between England and the Far East, and the desire to dominate the lines of communication between India and the imperial capital had influenced British policy in patrolling the shores of the Persian Gulf and establishing political control over the coastal principalities, the so-called Trucial States. But even in this region the ebb and tide of foreign policy is generally on a pattern similar to that already traced in relation to the states of Central Asia. Beginning with a scrupulous adherence to non-intervention in the internal concerns of the principalities, as long as maritime peace was maintained and foreign influence was excluded from them, we come to the stage when, impelled by the fear that Turkey or Persia might establish her influence in these states, there is a growing desire to meddle with their affairs and establish British paramountcy.

The Portuguese drive into the eastern seas had absorbed the Persian Gulf and the south Arab coast, but later when the Dutch and the British expelled them from these regions, the shores of the Persian Gulf naturally became the haunts of British commerce. This trade continued to flourish in the eighteenth century, but until its conclusion no political control appears to have been established over the chiefs of the outlying territories. However, with the opening of the next century, either as a safeguard against possible French intrusion or to secure commerce from piratical attacks, the British and Indian Governments entered into treaty relations with Persia or Maskat, or the petty chieftains bordering on the Persian Gulf, which involved gradual control over them and made the British pre-eminently liable for maintaining maritime peace there. Piracy and mutual

warfare were the bane of these lands, interfering with trade and more particularly the pearl-fishing, a profitable profession. At the same time, on the Arab mainland two important movements were on foot, one was the rapid expansion of Wahabism implying, in its political aspects, the supremacy of Nejd over the outlying small independent Arab principalities; and the second was the Turkish attempt to extend their empire over the Arabs and make it a reality too. Even the stagnant kingdom of Persia at times began to stir and endeavoured to assert its sovereignty over the coast. In these situations the Government of India was occasionally called upon to formulate policy and take effective action to protect the British monopoly of trade in the Persian Gulf.

The first half of the nineteenth century did not, however, have to face the problem of Indian Ocean security. But with the opening of the Suez Canal, and the free and extensive entry of the ships of European countries, the British Government did no longer maintain its old complacency. Not only was the monopoly of trade in danger, but in an emergency even the safety of British sea-routes and their imperial coastline was menaced. The importance of Aden grew manifold, as also of the harbours of the Persian Gulf. Then opened also the series of plans to connect the Persian Gulf by rail with Mediterranean coast or to link India by telegraph with Europe. These civilising instruments in the hands of imperialist powers became modern agents of political domination, and Britain employed them to establish close control over the Arab chiefs. But later when she failed to exploit the railway for her own ends, and Germany or Turkey desired to open the Tigris valley, British apprehensions were aroused. Similarly in later years, Russian ambitions for warm water compelled the British Government to have effective hold over the Persian Gulf to keep away Russia, France or Germany from so close a neighbourhood with India.

One of the earliest treaty engagements in this region was with Maskat in 1798, providing for the total exclusion of French trade and influence from that state. It was ratified in 1800 by Sir John Malcolm and led to the establishment of a British agent there. Thus commenced an intimate political relationship between Maskat and the British Government in India which grew in intensity from year to year. The next engagement was with the Jowasmi tribe in 1806, binding it to respect the British flag and not to indulge in piratical activities. But it failed to be effective in rooting out the evil and the British were compelled to send expeditions against the chiefs of the tribe in 1809 and again in 1819, ending in their being crushed and

leading to the stipulation of a general treaty in 1820 with the coastal Shaikhs, binding them to desist from piracy. In the last expedition the Sultan of Maskat had fully co-operated. Meanwhile, in 1815 the Chief of Bahrein had sought British support against Maskat and had obtained from the Resident "a sort of informal assurance of friendship."¹ But the Shaikh did not desist from joining the pirates in 1820, though ultimately he subscribed "to the anti-piracy contract of that date."

More notable, however, was the arrangement in 1835, by which the Shaikhs of the southern coast were bound to observe a truce "during the pearling season not merely to abstain from piracy but to avoid all hostilities by sea."² This was renewed first annually till 1843, when it was extended for ten years, and then was converted into a perpetual treaty. Its object was to forbid not only piracies but all wars between independent Shaikhs, who were accordingly called the Trucial Chiefs. It was subscribed to by the Chief of Bahrein and that of Katr. Soon it became a well-established convention, having the force of a treaty stipulation, throughout the Persian Gulf region, that no warlike movements should be conducted on the waters of the Gulf, and that the British Government was the custodian of the inviolability of the seas. This had naturally the effect of banning war among the Chiefs and ensured comparative peace. British jurisdiction was established throughout the zone and they had the right through their navy to enforce the obligation. Thus was extended a sort of British protectorate over the Persian Gulf which had for its basis the unacknowledged right to determine and control the foreign policy and inter-state relations of the Trucial and other Chiefs, on the system developed in the Native States of India.

Nonetheless, neither the perpetual Truce nor the treaties with Maskat or Bahrein had invested the British Government with the right of interfering in the internal affairs of the chiefships or determining their succession. It is also problematical if these treaties gave the British Government any right to meddle in the mutual relations between the Chiefs and the Amir of Nejd, the Shah of Persia or the Sultan of Turkey. The arrangement with the Trucial Chiefs did not apply to Turkey or Persia, whose ships could ply over the Persian Gulf, even with hostile intentions against any one or more of the bordering chiefs, without the British Government having the right to interfere with their liberty to do so. Yet, the unwritten law

¹ Whigham, *The Persian Problem*, p. 31

² Ibid. p. 32

was there and British might was present to enforce that no warfare should be prosecuted by way of the sea. Peace and security of the region, protection of British subjects and their trade and the ultimate British supremacy in these waters, were the justifications for this policy. Even internal matters were by this canon comprehended within the all-enveloping British protectorate which in the interest of peace did not permit any prolonged disturbances in any principality.

Maskat affords an example of British solicitude and interest in the internal developments of the Arab principalities where some action had become necessary, both owing to the fear of trouble and anarchy inside and the possibility of foreign influence prevailing from outside. As has been mentioned earlier, the Sultan of Maskat and ruler of Zanzibar, Saiyid Said, was on intimate friendly relations with the British Government and had rendered assistance not only in suppressing piracies but also in eradicating traffic in slaves. He was a liberal ruler, and as long as he lived this relationship was greatly cemented. His reign was constantly disturbed by the Wahabi threat to his territories, and as Curzon puts it, "The Sultan was sometimes only saved from extinction at the hand of the Wahabis by the friendly intervention of the British Government, under whose arrangement he paid a yearly tribute to the Wahabi Amir."¹ On his death the two portions of his dominion, Maskat and Zanzibar, were bequeathed respectively to his eldest and fourth sons. For the effective execution of this arrangement was required some definite agreement between the two to facilitate their proper administration. Lord Canning's arbitration was sought, and he, in his award of 1861, confirmed the arrangement made by the late Sultan, with the proviso that the Sultan of Zanzibar should pay an annual subsidy of 40,000 crowns to his elder brother, the ruler of Maskat, to compensate for the poverty of his inheritance. Announcing the award the Viceroy wrote to each of them, "I am satisfied that these terms are just and honourable to both of you; and as you have deliberately and solemnly accepted my arbitration, I expect that you will faithfully and cheerfully abide by them, and that they will be carried out without unnecessary delay. The annual payment is not to be understood as merely personal between your Highness and your brother, it is to extend to your respective successors, and is to be held to be a final and permanent arrangement, compensating the Ruler of Muscat for the abandonment of all claims upon Zanzibar, and adjusting the inequality between

¹ Curzon, *Persia*, II, p. 436

the two inheritances.”¹ To what extent was the Government of India obligated to enforce the implementation of these agreements came up for decision not long after, and the Governments in India and England had to determine their policy in this context.

The problem of succession also became a live issue in 1866 when Saiyid Thoweynee, the ruler of Maskat, was assassinated at Sohar and his son Salim, who became ruler, was suspected of the crime. His government was weak and unpopular owing to the suspicion of parricide attaching to him as also owing to the later unprovoked attack on his uncle, Hamid bin Salim, Chief of Musnah. His succession raised many complications. The Sultan of Zanzibar was unwilling to pay the annual subsidy and appealed to the British Government for permission for its discontinuance. The Persian Government also expressed the intention of terminating the lease on Bunder Abbas. But the most serious was the rebellion of Azan bin Ghias, a close relation of the deceased ruler. Salim was unable to suppress the armed disaffection and sailed to Bunder Abbas on October 12, 1868, to endeavour for the recovery of his throne from there. His expulsion led to the election of Azan as Sultan or Imam. Salim soon returned to the Arabian coast and strained every resource for his restoration, but could not meet with success. Another claimant, Saiyid Turki, a son of the deceased ruler, was then living in pensioned exile in Bombay and was believed by some British officers to have good prospects of replacing Azan. Azan was also seeking British recognition. Thus, the dispute for succession in Maskat brought the question of British recognition to the forefront, as also the problem relating to the Zanzibar subsidy and relations with Persia. The problem of Wahabi claims for tribute on Maskat also loomed prominently. Sir John Lawrence and Lord Mayo had, therefore, to lay down the policy and determine the attitude of the Government of India towards these matters.

In the course of the dispute for power in Maskat, the Government of India had occasion to enforce interdict on attack by sea. In December 1868, Salim was endeavouring to rally men round him on the Arab coast and contemplated an attack by sea on some ports of Oman. When this news was communicated to the Government of India, it authorised the Bombay Government to warn Salim “against any act that might tend to a breach of the maritime peace,” who was thus prevented from attacking Maskat. The Government of India was even

¹ Quoted in Despatch No. 1 from the Secretary of State, dated 6 Jan., 1869, Pol. Progs. Feb., 1869, No. 50.

prepared to use force against Salim or Turki "if either made any warlike attempt in the hope of accomplishing his purpose from the seaboard," though "operations by land would not be interfered with."¹ But two months later the embargo was raised so far as Turki's departure from Bombay was concerned. Nonetheless, in April no departure from the law of the Gulf was permitted when Azan showed the inclination to despatch armed vessels against Gwadar from where his agent was expelled and the people had accepted Saiyid Nasir, a son of Thoweynee, who had reached there on 9th April. No vessel of war was permitted to leave the harbour. And later in June, when Nasir in his turn sought permission to cross the Gulf with a force to operate against Maskat, he was not allowed to launch on such an undertaking. All this was done in strict adherence to the terms of the Truce which had become a well-recognised custom of the Persian Gulf and had invested the British Government with the right to enforce them, though strictly the Truce did not apply to Maskat. The maritime peace had application only to the hostile movements by sea against a foreign coast and did not cover movement of forces or armament by any chief for supplying his forts along the unbroken coastline of his territories.²

We may now examine the policy regarding succession to the throne. Salim's accession in the shadow of suspicion of parricide had persuaded the Government of India to suspend his recognition, but his envoys arrived in India and trouble had started in Oman, incited by the Wahabis. Sir John Lawrence's Government in 1866 believed that Salim might consolidate his power later, and then "we may have no option but to recognise him as Sultan."³ However, the suspension of relations did not imply "any abrupt abandonment of . . . long established relations with the State of Muscat" or "the abrogation of Treaty obligations towards his people." The Government of India would not tolerate that the ruler of Maskat might be subject to "the influence of the French or any other Foreign Power."⁴ Hence, to prevent Salim's subjection to any foreign influence, the Government of India gave him recognition as a *de facto* ruler. In this context a principle was enunciated that the personal merits or demerits of the ruler should not affect the question of his recognition or withholding of any of his rights

1 Despatch to the Secretary of State, No. 18 of 9 Nov., 1869, S.I. Progs. 1869, No. 239.

2 Ibid.

3 Govt. of India to Bombay Govt. 11 April, 1866., Pol. A. Progs. No. 346, 1866.

4 Ibid. No. 361, 18 April, 1866.

as the chief of the principality. Further was emphasised the duty "to support that ruler whom the subordinate chiefs and people have chosen for their head, and so long as he can maintain his position we are bound on broad grounds of policy to give Syud Salim at any rate our moral support."¹

Later when Azan bin Ghias was declared Imam by expelling Salim, the question of his recognition came to a head. The Secretary of State naturally assumed that on his finally establishing his authority in Maskat he would be recognised as its *de facto* ruler.² The basis of recognition, according to him, was that Azan was ruler "in accordance with the wishes of the people" and was "acceptable to the population of the country."³ The Government of India, however, did not feel justified in deciding their attitude on the basis of the information available to them. Hence they decided to depute Colonel Pelly to report how far the conflicts in Oman would affect his stability on the throne. One factor influencing the decision of the Government of India was the possibility of the establishment of Wahabi authority in Oman and its influence on Indian politics. Their primary motive was to have a stable "regular government in the midst of lawless tribes" which would help British commerce. This matter led to prolonged discussion. The Foreign Secretary did not consider that there was any "right to step in between Azan bin Ghias and his subjects," and had no objection to *de facto* recognition on the basis of the existing political relations with him. However, Aitchison, the Foreign Secretary was equally determined to resist the grant of "a more formal recognition." In this connection, he wrote further that "a mere change in the internal constitution of the State or in the person of the Ruler does not affect national relations or treaties relating to national objects. It would, of course, suit Azan's purpose to get a letter formally recognizing his accession to the sovereignty of Muscat; but we should be directly involved in mischief. Muscat is no feudatory or dependency of ours, and it is no business of ours to concern ourselves with internal dynastic changes except when they affect the actual political relations existing between ourselves and Muscat."⁴ The Secretary did not favour Azan's recognition and in that had the support of the Bombay Government. Lord Mayo did not regard the information adequate to merit a decision in

1 Govt. of India to Secy. of State, No. 81, 14 May, 1868, Pol.A.Progs., May 1868.

2 Secy. of State's Despatch, No. 1 dated 6 Jan., 1869, Pol.A.Progs., Feb., 1869, No. 80.

3 Secy. of State's Despatch, 30 July, 1869.

4 Aitchison's Note, 112, 1.69. K.W. pp. 1-2 S.I.Progs., 1870.

the matter. Nevertheless, the Government of India enunciated an explicit policy in Despatch No. 17 of 22nd February, 1870, and expressed the view that if "there was nothing in the internal affairs of the Muscat Government to render it probable that Azan might soon be dethroned by an internal revolution, we should not be indisposed formally to recognize his authority, and that we did not think that the mere fact of a menaced war with the Ameer of Riad ought to deter us from the recognition of a Chief who had succeeded in establishing his authority and maintaining himself as *de facto* Ruler for a considerable time, and who appeared to be the only Chief of whom it could be said that there was any reasonable expectation of his being able to maintain his power."¹ However, hostilities soon breaking out between Azan and the Wahabis and the fear of internal revolution affecting allegiance of his people, led the Government of India to put off the recognition till Azan had adjusted his differences with the Wahabis and succeeded in retaining his power in Maskat.

The revolution brought Turki also on the scene and he asked for a loan from the Government of India, which was declined. For some time his adversaries could not much prejudice Azan's position. Meanwhile, the presence of a Dutch corvette and French gunboat at Maskat, and the possibility of frequent visits of the vessels of European powers subsequent to the opening of the Suez Canal, had led to the apprehension that if not readily recognized as the *de facto* ruler, Azan might "be disposed to secure the interposition of some other power."² The Government of India, thereupon, invested Colonel Pelly with the discretion to offer him recognition, though it was not done. In May 1870, Lord Mayo's Government was convinced that "the time is approaching at which the recognition of Azan, if it is to be made at all, can be no longer delayed."³ But by the spring of 1871 circumstances had radically changed. Azan was slain and Turki had succeeded to power. The policy of the Government of India, too, had altered, and the growing feeling shared by Aitchison, Lord Mayo and some members of the Council against enforcing the law of maritime peace in the Persian Gulf, as well as interference in the domestic concerns of Maskat, presumably because of the fear of foreign influence prevailing there otherwise, had led to the view that "formal recognition of the British Government" should not be withheld from the new ruler. Not

1 Despatch to Secretary of State, No. 17, 22 Feb., 1870.

2 Despatch to Secretary of State, No. 31 of 27 May, 1870. S.I. Prog. 1870, No. 253.

3 Ibid.

only was the recognition to be given but no embargo was to be placed on his endeavours "to recover by force of arms the outlying possessions of Muscat," and he was to be informed that he would be "quite at liberty to do so, and that there is no longer any necessity for maintaining so rigidly as heretofore the prohibition of warlike operations outside the Persian Gulf."

Intimately related to the succession question was that of the payment of the subsidy to the ruler of Maskat, by the Sultan of Zanzibar, and the obligation of the Government of India to enforce it. Salim's succession in doubtful circumstances encouraged Sultan Majid of Zanzibar to discontinue to remit the stipulated subsidy. The British Government was not averse to the proposal owing to the hope that it would stimulate suppression of the slave trade. The Government of India, however, did not concur in this suggestion owing to its possible consequences on the confidence in British faith and the power and stability of Maskat as an element of peace in the Persian Gulf region. To the Secretary of State's query regarding the extent to which British honour was involved,¹ the Government of India explained the circumstances in which an award was given by Lord Canning, and protested that "If it is to be left to the option of the Sultan of Zanzibar to evade fulfilment of an award so unequivocal in its terms and concluded under such circumstances, it appears to us that the moral influence of our political officers in the Persian Gulf will be weakened, the Chiefs of the Oman coast will prefer seeking the adjustment of their quarrels by the sword to relying on the mediation of the British Government, and there will be danger of a relapse to the state of anarchy in the Persian Gulf which it has cost many years of negotiations and not a little bloodshed to put down."² The proposal was deemed to be subversive of the whole structure which had so assiduously been built in the Gulf region and on which depended the security of British commerce.

Another reason advanced was that without such financial assistance the Sultan of Maskat would be unable "to maintain a settled Government or preserve his position against Wahabee influence which even now it is difficult to resist."³ Long discussion followed between the Government of India and the British Government, which was bent upon relinquishing the Sultan of Zanzibar from that obligation. The Secretary of State emphasised the embargo on warfare, by way of the sea, imposed by the Government of India which prevented the

1 Despatch No. 20, 15 Feb., 1868, Pol. A. Progs., No. 62, 1868.

2 Despatch to Secretary of State, No. 81, 14 May, 1868, Pol. A. Progs.

3 Ibid.

Zanzibar ruler from enforcing his right to withhold the subsidy when the original conditions had altered, and even suggested that if any financial aid was necessary for the strength of Maskat, the payment of subsidy might be taken up by India. The despatch of 22nd February, 1870, to the Secretary of State was a spirited rejoinder wherein it was pointed out that the Government of India had not only been responsible for the award but for its enforcement on two occasions. The argument of the effect on the chiefs of that areas was again emphasised in the statement that, "In the eyes of the Ruler of Muscat and of all the Chiefs and tribes of the Persian Gulf, we are bound to see our just decision carried out; and it will be impossible to persuade these people that an arbitrament so made and actually enforced by us differs in any way from a solemn treaty. We apprehend, therefore, that little respect will be paid to our awards either in the Persian Gulf or elsewhere if the idea gains ground that they may be evaded by either party." The good results of the past fifty years in saving bloodshed and maintaining peace would be undone as in "the future these Chiefs will prefer the adjustment of their quarrels by the sword if we give them ground to believe that we are indifferent to the execution of our awards."¹

The Government of India had all along insisted that the subsidy was not confined to any particular family but that the agreement was with the ruler of Maskat and as such was due to that state. Disputed succession or internal revolution did not vitiate the right of the state to the subsidy, hence the *de facto* recognition of any ruler would *ipso facto* involve the obligation to enforce the award. The Government of India rightly stressed the point that the *de facto* recognition of Azan would be futile without the corresponding recognition of his right to the subsidy, and wrote "We can conceive nothing more detrimental to our good name, more damaging to our legitimate influence in Oman, or more likely to encourage a resort to force and violence in the settlement of the quarrels that are constantly arising in the Persian Gulf, than a declaration that we are prepared to countenance the Sultan of Zanzibar in the evasion of the just demands of the Muscat State."²

The British Government, nevertheless, impelled by considerations other than those of the Persian Gulf, decided in favour of the Zanzibar Sultan's withholding the payment. The decision had repercussions in Oman where Turki had assumed power and was prepared to assert his right by resort to force. There had

1 Despatch to Secretary of State, No. 17 of 1870.

2 Ibid.

been previously rumours of Zanzibar's inclination to invade Maskat. Lord Mayo and his Government had naturally resented the decision of Her Majesty's Government and were prepared to interpret the Trucial interdict as not being applicable to the Gulf of Oman and waters outside the Persian Gulf. The ruler of Maskat had never been a partner in the Truce and as such was not bound by the terms of it. The Government of India, therefore, in a mood of righteous indignation and petulant pique, repented departure from the principle of non-intervention, and believed that any restrictions on the movements of the Sultan of Maskat in vindicating his rights would be a high-handed interposition of unjust authority. Even the late interference in the "domestic politics and dynastic changes" in Maskat was regarded as inexpedient.¹

This leads us to analyse the other question, that of applying the terms of the maritime truce, interdicting warlike movement in the Persian Gulf to the waters outside and on rulers not parties to the agreement. It has been previously mentioned how the Government of India had forbidden Azan from mounting an expedition against Gwadar to assert his legitimate authority, how Nasir, Turki or Salim had been prevented from using the water route, and Maskat Chiefs, at one time or other, had been subjected to the law of the Gulf, and thereby peace was maintained. In 1869 the Government of India had gone to the extent of instructing that "all naval operations by any party at Muscat or anywhere else should be prevented by force of arms if necessary."² But in 1871 the justice of the course was doubted, and chagrined at the decision of Her Majesty's Government on the Zanzibar subsidy issue, the Government of India in a fit of repentance and righteous adherence to absolute justice, desired to remove the interdict on Maskat and revert to the relations "which existed before we attempted to take on ourselves the forcible suppression of warlike operations in the Gulf of Oman."³ However, there was no intention to forgo the obligation for peace there. It was stated that "we are no doubt very materially interested in the preservation of the peace of these waters. If disturbances broke out, it might be difficult to prevent their spreading to the Persian Gulf. It has therefore been long our policy to exert our legitimate influence to preserve the peace on the coasts of Oman."⁴ But it could as well be achieved by friendly relations with the ruler of Maskat

1 Mayo's Minute—20 Feb., 1871; Despatch to Secretary of State, No. 13, 3 April, 1871, S.I. Progs., 1871.

2 Tel. to Bombay Govt., 9 Jan., 1869.

3 Despatch to Secy. of State, No. 13, 3 April, 1871.

Ibid.

and not by the exhibition of force.

It has been necessary to enter into some detail regarding British relations with Maskat to indicate the trend of policy towards the principalities in the region of the Persian Gulf. It is evident from the above description that the pattern of political relationship was similar to the one followed in respect of Afghanistan. Sir John Lawrence and Lord Mayo were reluctant to meddle in the internal affairs of the state and did not give more than a *de facto* recognition to every succeeding prince. Nonetheless, the Government of India was prepared to alter that attitude when there was fear of foreign assistance being invoked by any of the claimants. In that eventuality, to prevent alien influence being dominant in Maskat, the Indian Government readily offered recognition and was willing to uphold the rights of that state which it derived from agreements with the others. Maskat, like Afghanistan, was the pivot of British diplomatic relations in the Persian Gulf area, and consequently nothing was allowed to interpose which might affect adversely its strength and position. Insistence on the Zanzibar subsidy, energetic mediation in the dispute between Persia and Maskat on the issue of the lease on Bunder Abbas and possession of Gwadur, and solicitude for its security from Wahabi control, all were eloquent testimonies of British interest in Maskat.

Equally important is the instance of Bahrein as exemplifying the rights and obligations of the Government of India in respect of the territories in the Persian Gulf. This island had been, since the beginning of the nineteenth century, in direct relationship with the British and had been part of the territories subject to the Truce governing maritime peace. In 1861 again, a fresh treaty of friendship was contracted by which the Chief of Bahrein agreed to abstain from all maritime aggressions, war or piracy by sea, subject to his receiving support of the British Government in the maintenance of the security of his possessions. He also agreed to seek British arbitration.¹ But contrary to this agreement the Chiefs of Bahrein and Abudabai indulged in aggression on Gwadur. This infringement of the obligations of maritime peace in the Persian Gulf called for strong action which the Political Resident was authorised to execute. But owing to a gross mistake the enforcement remained abortive and the Gwadur tribe retaliated. The Government of India took a strong view of the action of Bahrein, and, in the interest of peace, reiterated the obligation of the British Government, on being apprised of an act of aggression by sea, "to take forthwith the necessary steps for obtaining reparation

1 Pol.A.Progs., Oct., 1861, No. 37.

for the injury inflicted and to take steps to ensure at all times the due observance of the articles of the maritime truce." Reparations were therefore to be exacted from the two offending chiefs.¹ As a penalty for his evil deeds the Chief of Bahrein, Muhammad bin Khalifah, was deposed and his brother Ali was set up, in his place.²

A fresh outrage developed soon after. The deposed Chief with the assistance of Nasir bin Mobarak and the Howajir tribe invaded Bahrein, defeated the force there, killed Ali and plundered some towns. Muhammad was in turn imprisoned by his collaborator Nasir and murdered. These events in Bahrein were a flagrant violation of peace; consequently the Government of India decided to take action by blockade or otherwise using force. The events in Bahrein, fortunately, had no immediate reaction among the other chiefs who showed no disposition to engage in similar outrages. Swift action was, therefore, necessary to inflict punishment on the aggressors "lest others, tempted by their apparent impunity, should begin to disturb the peace." The Government of India was not prepared to take over Bahrein under its direct rule, but was content with having the son of Ali restored to the Chiefship. Even successful action against the offenders did not lead to any alteration in the status of Bahrein when an engagement was made with the new Chief. The Government of India had consistently treated the island as an independent state whose Chief had entered into the solemn obligation to respect the terms of maritime peace. But his freedom was not to be limited except in so far as it affected the peace of the Persian Gulf, for his independence in regulating his internal government was not affected. Previous obligations were enforced on him and the Government of India engaged to protect him from aggression by sea.

The security and independence of Bahrein were not only incidental to the obligations of maritime peace, but were also important for British commerce and the safety of the seas to the west of India; and nothing could be permitted to affect this independence. In 1870, however, Persia and Turkey both asserted their sovereign rights over Bahrein. The Persian claim was more pressing, and at one stage there was even the prospect of a violent exercise of sovereignty. The Government of India

1. Foreign Deptt. to Government of Bombay, No. 797, dated 23 July, 1868, Pol.A.Progs., Aug., 1868, No. 18; Also No. 19 for a detailed account of the incident and action taken. See also No. 20, Despatch to Secretary of State, No. 124, dated 1 Aug., 1868.

2 Aitchison's Note dated 29 Oct., 1869, S.I.Progs., 1870, Nos. 74/89. K.W. for a detailed account of Bahrein affairs.

3 Pol.A.Progs., Aug., 1868.

did not admit this right and showed, by reference to the past, that at no stage in the nineteenth century had the sovereignty of Persia either been real or acknowledged. On the contrary the British Government had always denied it.¹ In 1861 when Persia demanded the transfer of the island to it, Sir Henry Rawlinson, the British Ambassador, had expressed the view of the British Government eloquently in the statement that "under no possible circumstances can the British Government be expected to concur in the proposed transfer of the sovereignty of Bahrein to the Persian Crown, since we have contracted engagements with the Arab Sheikhs of the island as independent chiefs, and since the maintenance of their independence is indispensable to the successful working of those plans of Maritime Police in the Persian Gulf which we have been at so much pain and expense to establish."² Again in that year, the Government of India informed the Minister in Teheran that "Her Majesty's Government have decided that Bahrein should be regarded as independent and subject neither to Turkey nor to Persia."³ In 1867-69, however, it seems a departure was made from the attitude in so far as the *de jure* rights of sovereignty of Persia over Bahrein were acknowledged by the British Government to the extent that information regarding action taken against the Chief of Bahrein was to be communicated to the Shah's Government.⁴ This was done to give a sop to Persia and wean her from the Russian side. But this concession was not palatable to the Government of India which resented any reference to Persian sovereignty. It was held that Persia was incapable of maintaining peace in the Persian Gulf and her rights would not only be opposed by Maskat and the Arab chiefs immediately but also be contested by the Wahabis, and Turkey might also put forward claims to supremacy. The Government of India, at the same time, did not abnegate the obligations to watch over the peace of the Gulf and put down aggressions. Hence the Indian Government was unable to countenance any revival of obsolete claims to sovereignty by Persia for that would adversely affect trade and prosperity of those regions.⁵ Turkish claims were also similarly rejected.⁶

1 Letter to Persian Charge d'Affaires, London, from Foreign Office, 29 April, 1869, F.D.S.H.Progs., 1869, No. 58; also No. 44, India Office to Foreign Office, 21 April, 1869; Despatch to Secretary of State, No. 18 dated 22 Feb., 1870 (Secret). S.I.Progs., 1870, No. 104. For claims of Turkey, see S.I.Progs., 1870, K.W. and No. 212.

2 Pol.A.Progs., March, 1869, No. 119.

3 Quoted in Despatch to Secretary of State, No. 18, 22 Feb., 1870, para 15.

4 Ibid., para 15.

5 Despatch, 22 Feb., 1870., para 26.

6 Despatch to Secretary of State, S.I.Progs., 1870, No. 212.

The position of the Government of India was that Bahrein, Maskat or any other chiefship in the Arab Littoral was an independent state with which certain binding agreements had been made and which, as the guardian of maritime peace in the Persian Gulf, the Indian Government recognised and respected. In the situation it was not prepared to admit the subjection of these chiefs either to Persia, Turkey, Wahabis or the British Government. The position and policy of the Government of India in the Persian Gulf were expressed as "protectorate in the Gulf is a matter of obligation rather than of right; that we have pledged ourselves to the Arab Chiefs, who are parties to the maritime peace to watch over the peace of the Gulf, to put down aggressions by sea, and to take all necessary steps for the reparation of injuries inflicted on them; and that from these obligations we cannot in good faith recede." Neither Persia nor Turkey could take the place of the British Government, and the Arab chiefs had no faith in either. Hence, unless it was desired to undo the work of the past fifty years and revert to anarchy, the British Government would be unable to recede from the obligations and admit Persian sovereignty there. As in Afghanistan, Kalat or elsewhere the British did not concede foreign interference in the Persian Gulf also, and imposed their protectorate to create a screen against encroachments from outside in the neighbourhood of India.

After 1870 particularly, the Turkish empire had put forth claims to suzerainty over the whole of Arabia including the coasts and waters of the Persian Gulf, on one side, and Yemen on the other. But this claim was not admitted by the Government of India as it clashed with the British interests or the existing agreements with the local chiefs. Commerce, maritime peace and rights derived from treaties were the determinants in the validity or otherwise of Turkish claims, and the policy of the Government of India was to acknowledge the states within its jurisdiction as being independent and thus not subject to Turkish suzerainty in so far as their relations with the British were concerned.

On 4th August, 1871, Aitchison very pertinently defined the position in these words, "At sea, the question is a totally different one. We must maintain our supremacy there, and so long as we have a sufficient fleet to keep the peace of the waters, to compel the Chiefs with whom we have Treaties to keep to their engagements, and to put down any disturbances which the Chiefs and powers with whom we have no engagements may attempt to excite, it does not much concern us, although they cut each

1 S.I.Progs., 1870, No. 212, para 12.

other's throat on land."¹ The Government of India had religiously adhered to the principles of allowing no such expeditions in the Persian Gulf, arise from whatever source they might, even Turkey or Persia, as might disturb the maritime peace, of which it had become the protector. This position had been attained by reason of the interest of commerce, voluntary agreements of the Arab chiefs, and the general consideration of peace and security in the Persian Gulf. Lord Mayo's Government strongly believed "that no exceptions to the policy we have hitherto pursued in those waters can be permitted without great risk to our influence being shaken and our power to preserve the peace at sea between those who are not parties to the treaties being weakened, if not altogether destroyed." Any concession to Turkey to use the Persian Gulf in an expedition against Saood of Najd would have far-reaching consequences in generally disturbing the peace, for then the Arab chiefs or Persia would refuse to be prevented from doing likewise and would result in the "loss of the position which the British Government has come to occupy in the Persian Gulf."² Exclusion of foreign influence whether of Persia, Turkey or any European power, was the basic element in British policy, for by reason of its supreme authority there the "permanence of its objects" could be achieved.

In September 1871, again the Government of India protested to the Secretary of State against any Turkish intrusion in the Persian Gulf, and in that context emphasised "that at no time was the maintenance of our position in the Gulf of more material importance than at present to British interests, to the encouragement of trade, and to the preservation of the peace of the Indian seas. It would be to us a matter of deep regret that so faithful an ally as Turkey should be the first to take a step calculated to alter a state of things, the maintenance of which we consider important to the interests of our Indian Empire."³ The Foreign Secretary Aitchison had made the position further explicit. He stressed the non-concern of the Government of India with the internal administration of the quasi-independent Arab tribes, and wrote, "It is a matter of absolute indifference whether they are sovereign or absolutely controlled by Turkey . . . As regards their external or national relations, it is a matter of fact that they have had for many years and still have certain relations with us which are expressed in the Treaties; as a matter of fact these relations were formed

1 Note by Aitchison, 4 Aug., 1871, F.D. Secret Progs., Aug., 1871.

2 Despatch to Secy. of State, No. 26, 23; May, 1871, para 8.

3 Despatch to Secy. of State, No. 57, 26; Sept., 1871.

independent of Turkey or any other Power. In respect to their relations with us as expressed in the Treaties these tribes were, and are, independent nations. Even if they were to part with every other attribute of national independence, that would not affect the question so far as we are concerned. The Turks may make them pay tribute; or may put a stop to their power of fighting on land; or destroy any other of their national attributes, but they have no power without our consent to touch those relations which as independent States they have formed with us."¹ According to the view then held, British control could be effective and legal only on the seas, land warfare was not affected by it, and the position sought at sea was to be maintained. And Lord Mayo, concurring with this view, did not admit any joint protectorate of the fisheries and insisted that Turkish action in regard to Nejd could not interfere with the British rights. Complete negation of the rights of Persia or Turkey into the Persian Gulf was the *sine qua non* of British policy, and that was then enforced.

On the other side of Arabia, along the Red Sea coast also, Turkish interference in the affairs of Yemen and claims of suzerainty over the Sultan of Lahej were not admitted, for with that was intimately connected the security of British interests in Aden. This small colony on the corner of the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea had been of importance to India, but with the opening of the Suez Canal had become a port of imperial importance. Therefore, it was impossible that Turkish claims of sovereignty over the Arabian chiefs should be permitted in close neighbourhood of Aden, specially in Lahej on which the sustenance of that port depended. In July 1872, Mukhtar Pasha of Yemen invited the Sultan of Lahej to give his allegiance to the Porte. This brought forth the question of policy and reference was made to the earlier statements by Lord Palmerston in 1836-39, and the view was held that the Turkish empire should not be permitted to incorporate forcibly those states in the neighbourhood of British possessions "which have for years looked on us as the Arbiter of their acts and who have been made to feel that we have hitherto been all powerful."² And Foreign Secretary Aitchison recommended that "it is very clear that we cannot allow the proceedings of the Turks to interfere with our Treaty relations with the tribes. So long as they steer clear of the Chiefs with whom we have Treaties, I do not think it matters much what the Turks do in Yemen; but when they attempt to establish their authority over Chiefs with whom we

¹ Note by C. U. Aitchison, 28 July, 1871, Secret Progs., Dec., 1871.

² K.W. Note 1. F.D.S.P. Jan., 1873, Nos. 86/106.

have formed relations, as with independent powers, it is time to cry halt.”¹ The British had imposed themselves as the paramount power and could not, without detriment to their prestige, allow those states to be incorporated into the Turkish empire. And on that reasoning, the Government of India represented to the Secretary of State, in March 1873, that Turkish interference would be “most dangerous to our interests at Aden” and desired that it be “most peremptorily prevented.” The Turkish Government was to be asked to deter the authorities in Yemen from the course adopted by them. As an alternative, or “in the event of these measures proving insufficient to check further encroachment, we shall be prepared to take the Chiefs directly under our protection, and to engage to defend them from aggressions which, in our opinion, are destructive to the peace of the country and most injurious to British interests in Aden.”² The Turkish Government was informed accordingly, and for the protection of British interests in Aden the authority of the Porte was prevented from being installed so close to that port.

The importance of Aden was great as a commercial *entrepot* and an important port on the route between India and England. But that was not all. The Resident there controlled at least nine states over which British protection had been extended and which could not be permitted to fall under any foreign influence, Turkish or European. The position of the Government of India was one of paramountcy, for the Arab chiefs were “required to abstain from political intercourse with foreign powers without the consent of the British Government, and to refer all disputes with each other to that Government for settlement.” The Government of India had on its part “engaged to defend them against unprovoked aggression by foreign powers.”³ This position had developed till about 1878 and was fully acknowledged. It was on this basis that the Government of India had interfered to protect Lahej against Turkey, and under the rule of a Governor-General like Lord Lytton, was fully prepared to enforce that policy. Turkish interference for establishing the sovereignty of the Porte had resulted in extending British control and formalising it.

In the Persian Gulf also the position was clearly defined. Turkish influence and authority on the Arabian coast were not allowed to extend and affect prejudicially British interests and rights there. While there was no intention to obstruct Turkish

1 Note by Aitchison, F.D.S.P. 1873, Jan., Nos. 86/106.

2 Despatch to Secy. of State, No. 17, March 1873.

3 Note by T.C.P., 25 May, 1878, K.W. No. 3, Oct. 1878, Secret Progs.

paramountcy on land, no naval interference by Turkey was tolerated in the Persian Gulf. Furthermore, the independence of Bahrein or Maskat from Turkish suzerainty was emphasised and the British right for defence and for enforcing the obligations imposed by treaties was asserted. In a note in the Foreign Department in September 1879, the following suggestions were put forth to establish British jurisdiction and responsibility :

- “ (1) That we retain our existing jurisdiction over the waters of the entire Persian Gulf.
- “ (2) That we assume a complete protectorate over the islands of Bahrein within the Turkish line.
- “ (3) That we allow no other power to interfere in proceedings on our side of the line, whether by land or water.”¹

This involved the recognition of “the Trucial Chiefs as being wholly subordinate, and not only in respect to their maritime proceedings, to the British Government. At some future time it might be politically advisable to amalgamate all these petty Chiefs with Muscat, to assign the Sultan of Muscat the position of a feudatory chief with jurisdiction as far as the Turkish boundary, and in return for this extension of territory, to take from him a tributary contribution towards the maintenance of the Naval Squadron in the Persian Gulf.”² A revision of the agreement was suggested having for its purpose the “recognition of the British Government as the Paramount power.”³ The occasion of negotiations with the Porte was to be utilised for not only limiting Turkish jurisdiction “but of rectifying our own defective title, and securing on a valid international basis the position to which by our costly labours we are fully entitled.”⁴ The *de facto* sovereignty which had been exercised for so many years over the chiefs of the Persian Gulf was to be legalised, and their independence which had been so prominently featured in the days of Lord Mayo was to yield to legal sovereign control by Lord Lytton. This would involve the negation of all Turkish claims, and the exclusion of Persian rights.

It will be evident from the account of British interests and policy in the Persian Gulf region, that gradually it tended towards the establishment of paramountcy there by repudiating the authority of any foreign power. As long as there was little fear of interference by Persia, Turkey or any other power, the policy of abstention from interference in the internal affairs of

¹ Secret Progs., Sept, 1879, K.W. No. 2, para 24.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

the chiefs and limiting British jurisdiction only to the enforcement of maritime peace was adopted. But the moment Turkey asserted her rights, the veil was thrown off and not only was her sovereignty denied but also the paramount authority of the British Government was explicitly interposed. The Persian Gulf coast, the Arab Littoral and the Yemen coast had become definite British Protectorates whose defence was the responsibility of the Government of India and whose political relations were controlled by it. This policy integrated well with that adopted towards Afghanistan or Kalat, and was the acknowledged basis of providing a defensive screen for India.

CHAPTER XIV

RETROSPECT

"A nation's foreign policy determines its course vis-a-vis other nations. It is a program designed to achieve the best possible position for the nation by peaceful means, or by means short of war." Thus has Kurt London defined foreign policy and has pointed out its objectives to be "the preservation of territorial integrity, the maintenance of political independence, and the attainment of a reasonable standard of living for the population." Such foreign policy cannot be static but, like the growth of an organic element, it tends to be dynamic. With the consolidation of a nation's political status and its growth within its boundaries, it may very often consider its future security to depend on the "possession of military bases or natural resources abroad." This process was clearly exemplified in the trend of policy of the British Government in India. When British dominion had reached the natural frontiers of India in the north-west, north or east, its policy was naturally directed towards creating a belt of influenced states whose economic resources and military bases might be exploited for its own ends. And the motive force was provided by the fear and jealousy of rival European imperialisms which were similarly engaged in establishing their dominions in Asia. Russia in the north, and France in the east, were developing their empires, and their rapidly expanding boundaries were believed to be converging towards the Indian frontiers. To preserve the territorial integrity of the British empire in India and to maintain its stability against their yawning aggression, came to be the basic elements of the foreign policy of the Government of India. It provided the primary incentive for contact with the neighbouring oriental states and continued to be the determining factor of British Indian policy throughout the nineteenth century. The danger of Napoleon's eastern invasion had stimulated the first approach to Persia, Afghanistan or Maskat, and the threat of Russian domination in the neighbourhood of India, menacing her security, remained the constant determinant of external policy throughout the century. The dynamism of the British empire and the stimulus of its economic advantage gradually tended towards a forward policy which did not even shrink from war, if it was necessary, to gain the object.

In the preceding pages we have outlined the main phases of British Indian policy in Central and Western Asia, and described the stage of relationship which was reached in respect of the states immediately bordering on India and the chiefships in the region of the Persian Gulf. The central piece of the edifice was, however, Afghanistan, relations with which became most intimate and gave character to the dealings with the other principalities. It was strategy which lent such importance to this country, and strategy cannot be divorced from foreign policy. The fact that Afghanistan provided the arteries of communication between the British military bases in India and the Russian bases in Central Asia, and harboured the gateways by which the British citadel in India might be entered, made the Government of India extremely sensitive about alien encroachments on Afghan soil. The integrity and independence of Afghanistan had, therefore, become objects of British solicitude and the fundamentals of India's foreign policy. Towards this end it was essential to maintain a strong and friendly ruler in Kabul who should look up to Calcutta for support and guidance. But gradually, impelled by the developments in Central Asia or influenced by factors of European diplomacy, the British Government was inclining to the method of subordinating the Amir of Afghanistan to its wishes and policy to achieve this purpose. Lord Auckland's experiment in 1838 to seat a dependent ruler on the throne of Kabul was a step in this direction. Its failure, however, prevented further application of that technique, and for many years a policy of complete non-association or non-intervention was followed. It was essentially a policy of non-involvement in the internal conflicts of that country and of complete non-committal. But the fast expanding Russian empire, so close to Afghan borders, made impossible continuous and rigid observance of this attitude of unconcern. Even the great apostle of non-intervention, Sir John Lawrence, had to modify his policy and advocate assistance in money and arms to the *de facto* Amir in order to stabilise his government and keep him away from seeking aid from the enemies of Great Britain. But he sought no countervailing advantages from the Amir and was content to be satisfied with mere assurance of friendship. However, the swing of the pendulum was in the other direction, and successive Governors-General were prepared to enlarge the scope of this relationship and prepare the ground for the eventual reception of a British envoy in the sealed territories of Afghanistan. European complications and the imminent threat of Russian expansion beyond the Oxus, which might ultimately envelop Herat, Kabul

or Kandahar, brought to a climax this tendency, and we find Lord Lytton, Lord Salisbury and Disraeli even invoking the aid of war to compel the Amir to have British Residents in his country. From mere formal relations of friendship, the tendency was once again in the direction of having a subordinate ruler in Kabul whose foreign policy would be controlled by India, and who would seek advice and guidance from the British representative at his court. Lord Lytton did not succeed, but the post-war settlement by his Liberal successor achieved control over Kabul's foreign policy, however, without making the Amir a mere feudatory.

This swing towards greater control was not without its compensatory obligations. In 1855, the Government of India had accepted no liabilities and given no guarantees for rendering definite aid to the Amir of Kabul. Mutual friendship was all that was stipulated for, though, on his side, the Amir had been charged with the obligation of treating the friends of the British as his friends and their enemies as his enemies. There was no mutuality and reciprocity of obligations, and there was imposed no limitation on the discretion of the Government of India to render assistance to Kabul or act otherwise. Against Persian danger in 1857, specific help was given, but the commitment was temporary and against a definite contingency. Subsequently for many years, in spite of the persistent desire of the Amir to bind his friend in an unequivocal obligation to help when Afghanistan needed it, every subterfuge was adopted to maintain the freedom of the Government of India, even at the risk of displeasing the Amir. But in fact help was not denied, for the embargo was only on the stipulated help which would restrict the liberty of the Government of India and might land it into inconvenient and undesirable situations. But this attitude did not long continue. The Amir's need and Russia's policy in Central Asia predisposed the British Government to accept obligations of assistance on condition that the Amir would accept British representatives in his country. The price was too high and disproportionate to the advantage accruing to the Amir. This caused tension and the war, but when peaceful conditions once again prevailed, the new ruler of Kabul had written assurance of support against external aggression, an obligation which had been so long resisted, without having to submit to the humiliating and positively dangerous stipulation of stationing British agents in his kingdom. The Government of India had secured a legal title to influence and direct the foreign relations of Afghanistan, but had imposed on itself the obligation of rendering adequate help

to that country, whenever its integrity and independence were threatened. The period before 1882 was a preparatory stage for this climax, and, in the years to follow, the subordination of external sovereignty of that kingdom was an established fact of India's foreign policy.

This was no isolated development, however, for within this period owing to the operation of the same factors, similar jurisdiction had been established in the states of Kalat and Chitral on the north-west frontier of India, Maskat and Trucial Chiefs in the Persian Gulf, and Burma, Bhutan and Nepal in the east and north of India. A belt of dependent states, outworks of the British empire, whose foreign relations were wholly dominated and whose protection had been fully guaranteed, was then created and every endeavour was made to extend it in the direction of the gaps. To the north lay the states of Kashgar and Tibet, whose inclusion in this belt was essential both for the security of India and for providing forward bases for radiating the British imperial interests beyond. While diplomacy had succeeded in Kashgar in bringing the Atalik Ghazi within the orbit of British influence, prior to his ruination by the Chinese deluge, little was achieved in Tibet before the end of the period under review. A similar policy was even contemplated at times for Persia, and Merv, and advocates were not wanting who would embrace Khiva, Bokhara or Khokand within its scope, but circumstances prevented its extension in those directions, and the Central Asian Amirates were absorbed into the Russian empire before the Government of India had relinquished its creed of absolute non-intervention. The obligations towards the dependent states were of protection against aggression, arbitration of disputes and restraint on their acquisitive ambitions. But there was no design or desire to interfere in their internal administration, all that was sought for was control so as to prevent their being exploited as bases, political or military, by a hostile or rival European imperialism, and to enable their military bases being utilised in case of an emergency for action against an enemy. This was an immense advantage fruitful of British-Indian security.

Imperialism in the nineteenth century was running to a pattern. It was not the British empire alone which was adopting these methods and seeking advantages against the weak oriental neighbouring states and tribes. Russia's process of empire development was not dissimilar, though in her case owing to their ambition for glory and military decorations, her military officers and governors were more prone to resort to the sword to bring her weak neighbours under control. Treaties

of trade, extra-territorial rights, and subordination of external relations were the means adopted by Russia in her dealings with Khokand, Bokhara and Khiva. She was more fortunate than her rival, for circumstances paved the way for the eventual assimilation of some of them into the directly administered areas of the empire. Military necessity, the requirements of developing means of communication, the search for scientific knowledge, and exigencies of civilising the so-called barbarous people, were the incentives, and agencies of imperial expansion. The British experiment in India as regards the Native States was the beacon light for all such endeavours, and that was applied unstintingly in Central Asia.

Imperialism thrives on easy communications which became in their turn facile instruments of its development. The British had adopted this mode in India with considerable advantage, and had, even before the Revolt of 1857, planned to connect the interior of the country with Calcutta and other ports by means of railways. The terrible shaking in 1857 further quickened the process, and not long after, India had been covered with 10,000 miles of railway. The conquest of the Panjab and Sind and the consequent necessity of strengthening the defence of the frontier led to the construction of strategic railways in the direction of the North-West Frontier, which were being pushed to the ultimate limit. Outside India, telegraph lines had been laid to connect her with England; and Baluchistan, Persia and the Persian Gulf region had been traversed by the telegraph wire. Agreements were made with the intervening countries and tribes, and the people were compelled to safeguard its security. Railway communication was contemplated in Persia and the Tigris Valley to exploit the commerce and resources of those lands as also to provide a land route between England and her possessions in the east. Russia had also, on her side, for strategic reasons, started the building of railways in her Central Asian dominion and many schemes were contemplated to connect Russian possessions with the frontiers of India or to secure access to the warm water in the Arabian Sea. Before 1880 this movement was only in its initial stages and the value of the railway as an inestimable means of imperial exploitation of backward countries was then being realised. In the years to come it became an established weapon of the Imperial Powers and the subject of complicated diplomacy. Anglo-Russian antagonism was further fanned by their projects of railway development which, after 1882, aggravated the tension. British policy of opening the Middle East was quite evident, but when Germany,

France or Russia became the competitors, British opposition to it was equally marked.

Commerce was the most prominent element of imperialism and no land however remote or inaccessible was believed to be outside its ramifications. The Government of India's interest in Afghanistan, Persia, Bokhara, Khokand or Kashgar was equally commercial as strategical, and it will be difficult to pick out one from the other. Russia was no less affected by this motive. The first treaties with Khokand, Bokhara or Khiva were eminently commercial in their import, and it may be surmised that commerce was made the handmaid of political control. British jealousy was activated more by the exclusion of their trade from the lands under Russian hegemony, and it was naturally then endeavoured to restrict the zone of such exclusion. Afghanistan, Persia, Baluchistan or the Gulf chiefships must at the same time be preserved as British monopolies where no rival European power should be permitted to establish a foothold. France was to be kept out, and, in the east particularly, her jurisdiction was not to be allowed to approach the British sphere of interest. Commerce had prompted diplomacy before and after 1880 when its edge was directed to new regions such as Tibet or Siam, and imperialism was assuming more and more the form of economic imperialism. Afghanistan had successfully defied all attempts at her economic exploitation, and after 1880, even when the ruler had agreed to subordinate his foreign policy, no encroachment was possible there, and that was one of the bases of tension and growing coolness.

Even before 1880, attention was riveted on Tibet whose opening for purposes of trade was sought by the British and India Governments. Lord Mayo's Government desired to open communications with the Dalai Lama of Tibet, and though the Bengal Government was opposed to any such move the Government of India was keen to proceed in the matter. The Duke of Argyll was also favourable to it. Approach was to be made through the Raja of Sikkim for direct negotiations with Tibet, on the one hand, and through the British Charge d'Affaires in Peking, on the other, because Chinese suzerainty over Tibet barred direct dealings between the Lamas and foreign states. Thus in 1870, the policy of isolation towards Tibet was discarded and friendly communications were desired, Colonel Haughton, the Commissioner of Cooch Bihar division had taken the initiative, particularly as he was keen that Indian tea should find a market in the land of the Lamas. His view was that "it cannot be either to the advantage of the Rulers.

of Thibet or the people that our produce should be excluded; therefore, the existing narrow policy can scarcely be theirs. In any case, I think an attempt should be made to remove existing barriers to free trade.”¹ And because China was believed to be responsible for these restrictions, effectual measures were desired to be taken there for removing all limitations on the free passage of merchants and travellers. But the difficulties were great. Extension of trade through the agency of China was not possible, for as the Charge d’Affaires in Peking wrote, “There is no chance, I fear, at present, of obtaining this through the Government of China. It denies even our right to claim a passport for travelling purposes to Thibet; and I must admit that I do not think our Treaty secured the right. Great as the influence of China undoubtedly is in Thibet, the territory is not Chinese, and I doubt that China levies any revenue within it.”² Thus, apart from securing information about trade routes and entertaining the proposal to develop the Hindustan-Tibet road, no further progress was possible. The intransigence of China, the unresponsiveness of the Lamas and the preoccupations of the Government of India elsewhere, prevented any extension of the attempt for almost a decade, and despite the keenness of British imperialism to include the hermit land within its tentacles, Tibet continued to remain free from exploitation and encroachment by Europeans for long.

British interest was not confined to Tibet in that direction. Bhutan had been subjected to their influence, Sikkim was virtually a protectorate, and in Nepal, Maharaja Jang Bahadur was a loyal friend and keen ally. A British Resident was stationed in Kathmandu, but there were restrictions on his free movement in the country. The Government of India had no desire to countenance any limitations on the liberty of their agent to explore the country and meet its people freely, and protests were contemplated. But no decisive step was taken at the moment which would create a crisis. Maharaja Jang Bahadur had offered Nepalese troops to the Government of India for internal security purposes when the Afghan War was on, and there was apprehension that British troops might be transferred to the North-West Frontier. Relations with Nepal continued to be cordial, and the Government of India was keen to protect that kingdom from any interference by China.

East of India, Burma was gradually and by slices falling within the British dominion; and the stage was being set for its

1 Haughton to Eden, No. 69, 22 July, 1870. Pol.A.Progs., Oct., 1870, No. 70.

2 Wade to Aitchison, 10 Nov., 1870. Pol.A.Progs., Feb., 1871, No. 110.

eventual merger with India by the final extinction of its independent kingship. Yunnan was also attracting British attention, and the Government of England had been prompted by various commercial bodies and private persons to explore the trade routes to Western China with the object of extending trade and building railways there. Her Majesty's Government had desired the Government of India to take the initiative in the undertaking, but the latter had long resisted employing Indian revenues on such an expedition. But, ultimately in 1876, it was prevailed upon to despatch a mission under Mr. Marjory to Yunnan. It was an unfortunate enterprise, for the envoy was murdered. But attempts continued, considerable information was collected, the Muslim population there was encouraged and even a mission (Panthay Mission) was entertained. All this was done against the wishes of China, but beyond the preliminary endeavours to open that land from its landward backdoor on the borders of Burma, little progress was made in this adventure. It may not also be inappropriate to mention here the alarm and concern with which the French attempts in Annam were viewed by the British and Indian Governments, and objection was taken to some clauses of the commercial treaties between France and the King of Annam. It was difficult to prevent France from establishing her influence there, and Foreign Secretary Aitchison, considering the danger to be remote, entertained the complacent view that the British had no right to object to it. But these proceedings of France in the distant east had repercussions on British policy towards Burma and Siam. Even before this, close relations with Siam had been established and the question of communications through Kra Isthmus had been mooted. The suggestion of digging a canal yielded place to the proposal for a railway which had the object of preventing French monopoly in the Gulf of Siam and had a more commercial than political aspect. Before 1880, the beginnings of a definite imperial policy in the east are also clearly evident, for the commercial interests and jealousy of the rival European imperialisms did not permit the British Government to leave these lands alone. A policy similar to that in the west was on the anvil, and Burma or Siam had in the east a role akin to that of Afghanistan or Persia in the west.

A word may also be added here about the trend of policy towards Persia. Cordial relations with the Shah of Persia in the earlier years of the nineteenth century had been largely conditioned by the solicitude of the Government of India for the integrity of Herat, Afghanistan or Kalat. Persian ambitions of eastward expansion, therefore, militated against continued

friendliness between the two and the British influence at the Court of Teheran. British relations with the Persian Gulf chiefs and the interests of trade and security in that region also came into conflict with the traditional claims of Persian suzerainty. Thus, while the desire for closer commercial relations and opening Persia by the development of communications, both railway and inland water transport as well as telegraph, as also for safeguarding the route to India, prompted the necessity of intimate friendly relations, the Government of India could not do so at the risk of endangering relations with Afghanistan or Kalat or weakening its control over the Gulf chiefs. On the other hand, Persia also had no wish to be bound by an alliance which would neither help her in implementing her ambitions nor assure security by the adoption of definite measures against Russia or Turkey, her two inconvenient neighbours. It may also be pointed out that the Government of India had no direct relations with Teheran, for at that Court Her Majesty's Government had their own representative who was controlled by the Foreign Office alone. Hence diplomacy there was not primarily guided by Indian interests.

In the early stages of the period under review, the Persian Court was eager to have security against possible aggressions of Russia on her north-eastern frontier, for Russian moves on the Caspian coast created alarm at Teheran regarding future danger to her provinces, Gillan and Khorasan. But the British Government was not in a position to promise anything more than moral support, and, for fear of reactions on the Afghan policy, did not even countenance the Persian demand for a four-power agreement relating to arbitration of outstanding differences. In the seventies, however, Indo-British interests called for closer relations with the Shah, for then Russian designs in the Trans-Caspian region had become quite evident, and the protection of the Turkomans from Russian domination was a pressing necessity. In 1872, the Foreign Office prepared a memorandum in which a suggestion was made for the strengthening of Persia to prevent contact between Russia and India, and for that purpose even the extension of Persian sovereignty over Herat, Seistan, Merv and Bahrein was to be allowed. This view did not find favour either with Sir Henry Rawlinson, British Ambassador in Persia, or with the Government of India. Rawlinson's view expresses the policy at that time. He wrote: "Persia will assuredly count for something—possibly for much—in the future history of the British Empire in the East. Placed as she is on the flank of the Debateable land between the Caspian and the Indus, it will depend a good deal on her action how and where a


contact may take place between Russia and British India. If she is strong and friendly to us that contact may be indefinitely postponed. If she is either weak or unfriendly the contact may take place—invariably, to the disadvantage of India—wherever Russia chooses to provoke a crisis. It should then be to our interest to conciliate her friendship and at the same time to give her strength and confidence in her own resources, any expense to which we may be put on this account being regarded as a sort of premium on the insurance of India.” But he opposed the extension of Persian territory as an essential element of her weakness.¹

Lord Mayo's Government concurred with this view and did not countenance any Persian move eastwards against the territories of frontier states with whom intimate friendly relations were the basis of the foreign policy of India. Hence no definite measures were adopted to strengthen Persia and it is not surprising that gradually that kingdom drifted under Russian influence. The Merv question, the problem of the Atrek boundary and the desire for the protection of the Turkomans had led the Government of India at one stage to consider diplomatic support to the Shah's Government in their *demarches* at St. Petersburg. But in the absence of definite assistance, Persia would not take a decisive step to draw the British chestnuts out of the fire, and ultimately agreed to the delimitation of her boundary by signing a treaty with Russia, without the interposition of England. It was the doubtful attitude of Persia which had prevented the British from supporting the suggestion to give Merv to Persia. But more than that, it was the Indian Government's policy, in the late seventies, to have direct control over all the lands to the north-west of India lying between the Russian empire and India, which prevented close approach to Persia. The result was that, in 1882, Persia was generally aligned with Russia and, though no immediate danger was apprehended from that quarter, yet Persia was not counted upon for the security of the route to India. Persia was desired to be under British influence both for commercial and strategical reasons, but in the absence of any definite policy for support to her, Persia did not form part of the system of imperial relations and did not become the outpost of the British empire.

Thus in the period under review, imperialism endeavoured to envelop the states of Central and Western Asia in its meshes. Commerce, communications and strategy all became its vehicles and no means were spared, not even the threat of war, real or

1 F.D.S.P. March, 1872, Nos. 244/46.

in the background, to enforce the willing or unwilling acquiescence of these states to submission. India's foreign policy, being wholly controlled by Her Majesty's Government and completely subordinate to Whitehall, was directed towards the furtherance of British interests. With Afghanistan, Persia, Kalat, Kashgar, or Chitral, as also with the Khanates of Central Asia or the Sultanates and chiefships of the Persian Gulf area, India had no interest other than that of friendliness, but her Government had to seek war and desire domination there because of purely British imperial designs. Yet it must be emphasised that in this period intimate relationship between the integrity and independence of the border states and India's own security, rather the identity of the two, was fully unfolded. Aden, the Persian Gulf, Kalat, Afghanistan, Kashgar, Tibet and Burma, all these were the bulwarks of her safety, and in their protection from alien encroachment lay the security of India also. On this basis was the policy of the Government of India then formulated, and that remained its basis for long. The foundations of India's foreign policy were then laid and a system of alliances and interests developed which provided for her security.



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INDEX

- Abbasabad, 87
 Abdulla Jan, *see* Jan Abdulla
 Abiverd, 87
 Abudabai, Chief of, 244
 Aden, 234; British interests in, 249, 250, 263
 Adrainchi, 21
 Afghan Civil War, 36
 Turkistan, 48, 88, 121-2
 War, First, 6, 9, 23
 War; Second, 111
 Afghanistan, Amir of, *see* Amir
 Afghanistan, as buffer state, 5, 10, 29-31, 41-45, 49, 51, 133; as route for invasion, 69, 70, 88, 92, 210-11; British agents in, 123-5, 131-2, 155, 158-60, 171, 176-7; frontier settlement of 46-51, 56-9, 62, 117-8, 128, 132-4, 137, 146, 176-7, 184, 216, 232; Indo-British Policy towards, 7, 9, 25-7, 32-40, 41-6, 49-50, 107, 120-7, 132-7, 143-9, 152-4, 159, 161-5, 192-6, 203-4, 217, 222-5; partition of, 216-21; Persian relations with, 2, 4, 5, 10-11, 54-7, 59, 60, 133, 217; Russian agents in, 205-7; Russian Policy towards, 29, 32-5, 45, 48-9, 109, 129-31, 150-3, 181-84; threat to, 26-7, 97-9, 101-11, 135, 142-5, 175, 201-4; treaty negotiations with, 125-8, 137, 143, 173-4, 193-9
 Afridi tribes, 186, 226
 Ahmed, Mirza, 80
 Aitchison, Sir Charles, 55, 62, 94, 239-40, 247-9, 260
 Ak and Ata-Bai tribes, 100-1
 Ak Masjid, 15
 Akcha, 48
 Akkal Tekke, 87, 89-90, 101, 113-17, 201; *see also* Tekkes
 Aksu, 80
 Ala Tau, 15, 84
 Alexandrovski, 14, 84, 100
 Ali Masjid, 206, 209, 225
 Ali Shor, 24-5, 33, 36, 38-40, 46-7, 49-50, 60-1, 63, 110-11, 121-4, 127-9, 131-2, 134, 136, 137, 145-6, 149-50, 152, 155, 162, 164-6, 168, 175, 177-9, 181, 183-6, 189-90, 193, 198, 200-1, 203-5, 208, 213, 216, 223, 231
 Alikhanoff, 116
 Aman-ul-Mulk, 186-7
 Ambala Conference (1869), 39, 38, 46, 61, 63, 121-3, 126-8, 130-1, 134, 137, 146-7, 153, 156, 193, 196, 231
 Amir, Abdur Rahman, 224, 230-1; of Bokhara, 17-9, 27; Dost Mohamed, 7, 23-4, 59; of Kashgar, 76-81; Sher Ali, 23-4, 37, 39-40, 46-7, 50, 63-61, 60, 121-2, 124-9, 131-48, 151-79, 181-108, 213-15
 Amman, 115
 Amu, R., 19; *see also* Oxus, R.
 Daria, 85
 Andijan, 21, 90
 Andkoi, 48, 88
 Andrews, W.P., 93
 Anglo-Russian Agreement on Afghanistan, 138, 160
 Anhata, 15
 Annam, 260
 Annenkoff General, 87, 89-92, 115
 Arabia, 91, 233-4, 237, 247, 249-50, 252
 Arabian Sea, 91, 211, 233, 259, 257
 Aral flotilla, 88
 Aral Sea, 14, 20, 29, 30, 85-6
 Aralsk, fort of, 14, 84
 Argyll, Duke of, 121, 123-4, 128, 130-1
 Artaba, 88
 Ashkabad, 87, 91, 113-14; Capture of, 115, 117
 Ashourada, 14, 101
 Astrabad, 14, 33, 87, 102
 Astrakhan, 83, 90
 Atrek, R., 20, 99-103, 262
 Attock, R., 87, 186
 Azan, 238, 240, 242-3
 Azim, Shah Abdul, 94
 Azreb-Turkistan, 15

 Baba Dormuz, fort of 115-117
 Badakshan, 47-8, 65, 88, 134, 317
 Badgheis, 91, 141
 Baghdad, 94-5
 Bahrein, 235, 244-5; Sovereignty of, 246, 251; Persian sovereignty over, 261
 Bajaur, 180, 183, 186
 Baku, 86, 89-90, 146
 Bala H sar, 215
 Balkash, L., 15, 84
 Balkh, 10, 29, 48, 86, 88, 90-1, 183

- Baluchistan, 56, 185, 211, 257-8
 Bami, 115
 Bamian Pass, 29, 91, 210-11, 212
 Baroghil Pass, 87, 187
 Basrah, 93-5
 Batum, 89
 Bedouin Arabs, 93
 Begs, the, 18, 80-2, *see also* Yakoob
 Bellew, H.W., 34, 168
 Bhutan, 256, 259
 Bir, 94
 Birjind, 210
 Black Sea, 83, 86, 89, 93
 Bokhara, 14, 17, 18, 21-3;
 Russian Treaty with, 28, 29,
 31-4, 41, 43, 45-50, 63, 65, 67,
 72, 83-4, 87-9, 97, 103, 121, 127,
 129, 130, 173, 181-2, 210, 212, 256-8
 Bolan, 30, 57-8, 91-2, 185
 Sibi railway, 92
 Bombay, 93, 237-9
 Bosphorus, 30, 113
 British Policy, *see* under respective
 countries
 British protectorates, 236, 251-2
 Brunnow, Baron, 41, 44-5
 Bujnoord, 87
 Bunder Abbas, 237, 244
 Burma, 51, 256, 259; British policy
 towards, 260, 263; King of, 79
 Burnes, Sir Alexander, 7
 Cabul, *see* Kabul
 the Amir of,
 Candahar, 107, 123, 132, 156, 159,
 211; *see* Kandahar
 Canning, Earl, 153, 184, 236, 241
 Cashmere, *see* Kashmir
 Caspian, the, 14, 20, 29, 30, 32, 73,
 83, 85, 86, 89, 92, 95, 97, 99-102,
 110-11, 113-14, 149, 210, 261
 Caucasus, the, 14, 86, 89, 106
 Cavagnary, Sir Louis, 186, 215
 Cayley, Dr., 68-9
 Central Asia: Beginnings in, 1-12;
 British policy of 'Masterly Inacti-
 vity', 23-40; Russia in, up to 1875,
 13-22; Russian Expansion checked,
 41-51; Seistan, 56-64; Afghan War
 and Settlement, 232; Afghanistan
 the Key to two-British Policy,
 254-7, 263; British pressure on
 Afghanistan, 180-208; breach with
 Sher Ali, 145-79, Imperial Power
 in, 124, 130-1, 133; Indo-Afghan
 relations, 120-44; Further Russian
 Expansion 'Mervousness', 97-119;
 Russian Policy pressure on
 Afghanistan, 180-208; Yarkand-
 Kashgar, 65-82; development of
 communications in, 83-96
 Central Asian Railway, 90
 Chamberlain, Sir Neville, 205, 207,
 211
 Chamkend, 15; the capture of, 16,
 84
 Chandrabhaga, 68
 Changchinmoo, 69, 71
 Charbar, 54
 Charikar, 225
 Charjui, 88-9, 129, 141
 Chat, 101, 113-14
 Chatham, 93
 Chien Lung, 65
 Chikishliar, 100-1, 114, 116
 Chimaz, 87
 China and Indo-Tibetan trade, 258-9;
 relations with Yarkand-Kashgar,
 65-9, 74, 77-82; routes between
 Russia and, 84-6; Russian treaty
 with, 21, 67
 Chitral, 180, 184; Aman-ul-Mulk of,
 186, 187-8, 209-10, 256, 263
 Chu, R., 14-15
 Chulak-Kurgan, 15
 Clarendon, Lord, 41-5, 232
 Colley, Colonel G. P., 185
 Constantinople, 74, 94-5
 Cossacks, 2, 13
 Cowley, Lord, 58
 Crimean War, 10, 15, 84
 Curzon, Lord, 90, 236
 Czar, the, 2, 3, 8, 16-17, 20,
 46, 75, 97, 101, 115, 151,
 192, 213
 Dadar, 185
 Dakka, 313-14
 Dalai Lama of Tibet, 258
 Dalhousie, Lord, 10
 Dardanelles, the, 113, 204
 Denghil Teppe, 114-15
 Denison, Sir William, 24
 Derbend, 85
 Derby, Lord, 79, 103, 106
 Diarbekir, 94
 Dir, 180, 184, 186
 Disraeli, 201, 255
 Dologoruski, Prince, 10
 Dungans, the, 21
 Durand, Norman, 35
 East India Company, 1, 9, 11
 Eastern Question, 204

- Elgin, Lord, 24
 Ellenborough, Earl of, 9
 Elphinstone, Mountstuart, 7
 Enfield rifles, 142, 188
 Euphrates, R., 31,
 Valley Railway, 93
 Faizabad, 87-8
 Firoz Mirza, 5
 Foreign Office, the, 23, 41, 47, 55, 60,
 75, 79, 102-3, 151, 261
 Forsyth, Douglas, 22, 45-7, 69-71,
 73-6, 78-9, 129, 131, 134, 146
 France, 4, 233-4, 253, 258
 Frankenstein, Treaty of (1807), 2
 Furrah, 57, 60

 Gandamak, 216, 219
 Geok Tepe, 90, 115
 Germany, 234, 257
 Ghazi, Atalik, *see* Yakoob Beg
 Ghazni, 210, 213
 Ghias, Azan bin, 237, 239
 Ghorian, 87
 Giers, M.de, 115-19, 183
 Gilgit, 187-8
 Gillan, 261
 Girishk, 211
 Goklan, 102
 Goldsmid, Colonel, 55-6, 62-3
 Gortchakoff, Prince, 17, 23, 41, 45,
 99, 103-4, 181, 232
 Granville, Lord, 20, 94, 98, 117-18,
 131-2, 137, 231
 Great Siberian Railway, 92
 Grey, Captain, 156, 173
 Griffin, Mr. Lepel, 219, 224
 Guattar, 56
 Gumah, 69, 70
 Gurgan, R., 102
 Gwadur, 54, 238, 243-4.

 Habibulla, Haji, 66
 Hairobs, 226
 Hartington, Lord, 222-5, 227-9
 Hassan, Mir Shahzada, 217
 Haughton T. C., Col., 258
 Hayward, Mr. 186-7
 Helmand, R., 57-8, 61, 127, 211
 Herat, 5; the first siege of (1833), 6,
 7, 9-12, 20, 22, 24, 29-35, 49, 57,
 59, 60, 86-8, 90-2, 98-9, 103, 105,
 107; British interests at, 108;
 Occupation of, 109, 116; British
 Agents at, 110, 115; Seizure of,
 117, 123, 127, 136, 147, 150; British
 Agency at, 152, 155-8, 159-60,
 176, 183, 189, 200-2; fortress of,
 203, 209-210; strategic position
 of, 211, 212-13, 216, 218, 224-5,
 229-30, 254, 260; Persian sove-
 reignty over, 261
 Herbert, 93
 Himalayas, 65, 69, 70
 Hindukush, 29, 83, 88, 121, 102-13
 Hindusthan-Tibet road, 259
 Hissar, 88
 Hosseinabad, 57
 Igdi, 101
 Ili, 21, 84
 Iltsk Vernoe, 84
 India, British power in, 161, 164,
 202-4; foreign policy of Govern-
 ment, *See under respective*
 Countries; North-west frontiers of
 83, 86, 88, 91-5, 97, 99, 101-2,
 182-8, 220-2, 224-7, 256-7; Secre-
 tary of State for, 37, 40-41, 102,
 106, 151; threat to security of, 2,
 4, 7-12, 20-2, 24, 26-32, 40, 42-5
 47-55, 57-65, 68-78, 81-2, 111-8,
 120-21, 142-4, 202-4
 Indus, R., 31, 36, 91, 185, 210, 261
 Ishkaman Pass, 187

 Jacob, General John, 184
 Jaffar Bai tribes, 101
 Jajis, 226
 Jalalabad, 134, 210, 313
 Jan, Abdulla, 127-8, 134, 145, 163,
 176-8, 181, 194
 Jang Bahadur, Maharaja, 259
 Jaxartes, R., 84, 89-7; *see also* Syr
 Daria R.
 Jizak, 87-8
 Jomini, Baron, 116
 Jones, Sir Hereford, 3
 Jowasmi tribe, 234
 Julak, 84
 Jutek, 15

 Kabul, British or Indian agents in,
 37, 39-40, 131-4, 147-8, 151-2, 154-6
 161, 165-9, 171-3, 176-7, 187, 190,
 193, 195, 200-4, 230, 254; Elphins-
 tone's embassy to, 7, 8; Russian
 agents in, 183-4, 191, 205-8;
 Russian influence at, 22-3, 106,
 181-3, 191, 201-4, 211; throne
 and ruler of, 24, 121, 147-8, 173,
 223-5, 230
 Kabul Diaries, 61, 149, 152
 Kalat, 43, 50, 51, 53-6, 58, 65, 70, 91,
 150, 161, 172, 180, 185, 209, 247,
 252, 260-1, 263

- Kamran Mirza, 6
 Kamtchatka, 13
 Kandahar, 5, 6, 10, 12, 24, 30, 32, 35, 38, 57-60, 91-2, 107, 110, 123, 132, 134, 152, 156, 159-60, 189, 210-3, 215-21, 223, 225-30, 254
 Karabutak, the fort of, 14, 84
 Karachi, 43, 93, 95, 227
 Karakoram, 69, 210
 Karakum, 20, 84-5
 Karassu, 102
 Karatau Mountains, 15-6, 84
 Karbala, 94
 Kangra, 68
 Karshi, 88
 Kashgar, 18, 21-2, 27, 41, 43, 65-82, 87, 97, 150, 180, 209-10, 256, 258, 263
 Kashgaria, 20-1, 66, 78, 210
 Kastala, 84
 Kastek, 15
 Kashmir, 68, 70, 186-8, 210
 Kathmandu, 259
 Katta-Kurgan, 18
 Kaufmann, Gen., 16, 18, 20-1, 46-7, 74-5, 100, 129-30, 136, 150-1, 181, 183-4, 192
 Kaulbar, Baron, 22, 67, 75
 Kazalia, 85
 Kazalinsk, 84
 Kodj, 54-5
 Kerki, 88, 90
 Kerman, 5
 'Key of India' (Herat), 91, 99
 Khalat, *see* Kalat
 Khalifah, Muhammad bin, 245
 Khan, Abdur Rahman, *see* Amir
 Afzal, *see* Amir
 Ayub, 217-8, 227, 230
 Bazuog, 66
 Dost Muhammad, *see* Amir
 Ibrahim, of Bampur, 54
 Jehangir, 66
 Khudayar, 21-2
 Koushid, 113, 136
 Meer Nazir, 53
 Nawab Atta Muhammad, 154, 171-4, 177-9, 183-5, 190-9, 200
 Syed Yakub, 74, 77-9, 127
 Yakub Khan, 145-8, 172-7, 214-7, 223
 Khartak, i, 3, 6, 11
 Kheirabad, 58
 Khelat, *see* Kalat
 Khiva, 14, 17-22, 27, 29, 31, 32-4, 44-6, 49, 83-8, 97, 99, 106, 136-7, 149, 181, 256-8
 Khodga Saleh, 118-9
 Khojas, 65-6
 Khojend, 16-7, 21, 86, 88
 Khokand, 14-9, 20-2, 27, 28, 29, 32, 34, 45-6, 49, 66-7, 72, 75, 83-4, 90, 97, 121, 149, 182, 183, 210, 256-8
 Khorasan, 2, 5, 9, 87-8, 261
 Khost, 31, 35, 185, 213
 Khotan, 66, 68-9, 80
 Kilif, 88
 Kirghiz, 13-6, 84-5
 Kirkee, 129, 141
 Kirkuk, 94
 Kisil Arvat, 86-7, 90, 101, 105-13, 115, 202
 Kum, 20
 Khuldja, *see* Kulja
 Khureeta, 166
 Khyber Pass, 194, 212-4, 224-6
 Kohat, 185-6
 Kokcha, R. 47-8
 Koo-Aral, 14
 Koolaj, 55
 Koorna, 94
 Kooshbegi, 66, 68-9, 71-2, 74
 Koot-ul-Basrah, 94
 Kopal, 84
 Kopat Dagh, 114
 Korrum, *see* Kurram
 Kra Isthmus, 260
 Krasnovodsk, 14, 20, 85-7, 100-1, 103, 105, 106, 113, 116
 Krijhanoffsky, Gen., 100
 Kubak, 56
 Kucha, 66
 Kuchansoor, 60
 Kulja, 21, 48, 84
 Kundooz, 29, 48, 88
 Kurrachee, *see* Karachi
 Kurram Valley, 31, 35, 184, 211-3, 217, 220-1, 224-6
 Kushalgarh, 185
 Kutais, 89
 Ladakh, 65, 68, 70-1
 Lahej, the Sultan of, 249-50
 Lahore, 2
 Lamas of Tibet, 258-9
 Lash-Jowain, 57
 Lawrence, Sir John, 11, 23-8, 34-7, 39-41, 70-1, 120, 122-4, 131, 133, 140, 142, 146-7, 153, 170, 184, 222, 227, 232, 237-8, 244, 254
 Lazareff, Gen., 114, 116
 Leh, 68
 Lesseps, 87, 91-2, 115
 Lobanow, Prince, 117, 231

- Loftus, Lord, 106, 183
 Lomakin, Gen., 87, 89, 100-3, 105, 107, 110, 112-14, 180, 201
 Lovett, Major, 56
 Lumsden, Lt.-Col., Peter, 28-30, 35, 184-5
 Lundi Kotal, 225
 Lytton, Lord, Viceroy, 81, 92, 102, 111, 113, 137, 161, 162, 166, 168, 171, 174-7, 179-86, 191-2, 197, 199-217, 219-23, 225-7, 229-32, 250-1, 255

 Mahomed, Dost, 153, 218
 Maimna, 48, 49, 88, 157, 210
 Maiwand, 227
 Majid, Sultan of Zanzibar, 241
 Makran, 53-6, 58
 Malcolm, Sir John, 3, 35, 234
 Malmesbury, Lord, 58
 Manchus, 65-6
 Marghilai, 21
 Mask, 15
 Maskat, 235-44, 246, 251, 253, 256
 Mastuj, 188
 Mayo, Lord, 38-9, 42-4, 49-50, 51, 53-4, 63, 71-2, 120-1, 123-4, 126, 128-31, 133, 140, 142, 146-7, 153, declaration in 1689 of, 164, 170, 195-6, 231, 237, 239-40, 243-4, 248-9, 251, 258
 Mazar-i-Sherif, 214
 McNeill, Sir John, 6
 Mecca, 18
 Mertoi, Bay, 85
 Mertui Kultuk Bay, 100
 Merv. Napier's Mission; 111-2; Persian suzerainty over, 112, 261-2; Russian interests in, 22, 33, 49, 86-9, 91; Russian threats to, 97-111, 116, 117-9, 149-51, 155-7, 180-3, 201, 202, 204
 "Mervousness", 97-117, 165
 Merve Shahjahan, 136
 Meshed, 9, 33, 87, 102, 106, 112
 Michaelovsk, 90-1, 115
 Michael's Bay, 90
 Micheri Pass, 214
 Midhat Pasha, 95
 Mitchell, Robert, 48-9
 Mithri, 185
 Mobarak, Nasir bin, 245
 Mohammara, 12
 Mohmands, 186
 Molla Kari, 90
 Montgomerie, Sir Robert, 68
 Mosul, 94
 Muhammad, Dost, 7-12, 23-4, 26, 46, 59, 230
 Nur, 124, 197
 Shah, 6, 9
 Muir, Sir William, 181
 Mukhtar Pasha of Yemen, 249
 Mullahs, the, 17
 Murghav, 88
 Muscat, *see* Maskat
 Musnah, Chief of, 237
 Muzart Pass, 21
 Mymneh, 33

 Najd, Saood of, 248
 Namanga, 21
 Napier, Captain, 111-3
 Nargin, R., 21, 72, 74
 Nasir, Saiyid, 238, 243
 Nasiruddin, 21
 Nejd, 234-5, 249
 Nejef, 94
 Nejmi Novogorod, 85
 Nepal, 51, 256, 259
 Nishapin, 87
 Nisitan, 94
 Northbrook, Lord, 102, 129, 131, 133, 137, 138, 140, 141, 143, 145-7, 151-4, 157-61, 164, 166, 170, 185, 196, 224, 227, 231, 232
 North-West Frontier, 33, 36, 92, 93, 108, 186, 205, 257, 259

 Oman, 238, 239, 241, 242; gulf of, 243
 Omask, 84, 92
 Orenburg, 14, 15, 20, 83-5, 87, 91-2
 Orenburgsk, fort, 14, 84
 Orfa, 94
 Ousley, Sir Gore, 3
 Oxus, R., 19, 20, 23, 29-31, 33, 45-9, 69, 73, 85, 86, 88, 90, 92, 97, 101, 102, 113, 118, 121, 127, 129, 149, 151, 171, 180, 201, 204, 210, 217, 254

 Palmerston, Lord, 249
 Pamirs, 87, 210-11
 Panjab, 23, 46, 68-9, 257
 Panthay Mission, 260
 Paropamissus, 211
 Peiwar Kotal, 213, 226
 Peking, 78-9, 86, 258-9
 Pelly, Sir Lewis, 154, 166, 177, 192-8, 200, 239
 Perofski, Fort, 17, 84
 Persia, British policy towards, 4, 5, 7, 11, 109, 111-2, 116-7, 216-7,

- 236; claim to Bahrein, 245-8; communications with, 91, 93-6, 108, 210, 257; frontiers of, 43, 50-64, 97, 128, 132, 231; relations with Afghanistan, 1, 5-6, 26-7, 50-64, 121, 133, 153-5, 174; Russian policy towards, 5, 10, 12, 34, 101-2, 107, 112-7
- Persian Gulf, British policy in, 233-5, 238, 240-52; route to India, 11, 93-5
- Pir Punjal Passes, 70
- Pishin, 213, 217, 224, 230
- Pishpen, 15
- Pishpik, 15
- Pollock; Sir Richard, 153
- Portuguese, the, 233
- Pottinger, Eldred, 6
- Punchgoor, 55
- Quetta, 34, 35, 37, 92, 106, 150, 184, 185, 211-2
- Rahman, Abdur, 22, 118, 121, 130, 164, 217-8, 227, 230-1
- Railways, 85-6, 89-96, 234
- Ram, Diwan Kirpa, 188
- Rashid-ud-deen, 66
- Rawalpindi, 185
- Rawlinson, Sir Henry C., 28, 31-4, 36-7, 86, 123, 184, 246, 261
- Red Sea, 249
- Reuter, Baron, 94-5
- Riad, Ameer of, 240
- Ripon, Lord, 25, 222, 224-7, 231
- Roads, 84-9, 259
- Roberts, Gen., 185, 215, 226-7
- Romanofski, Gen., 16, 86
- Roshan, 87-8
- Rostov, 89
- Russell, Lord, 60, 62-3
- Russia, communications in Asia, 83-92, 95-6, 115, 257; expansion, 10-13, 18, 28-34, 38-9, 47-9, 65-6, 74, 83, 97-8, 105, 112, 115-6, 181, 256; Indo-British policy towards, 4, 27-9, 42, 64-5, 75, 91, 97-8, 103, 109-13, 124, 127, 129, 135, 144-50, 175-6, 180, 192, 202-9, 212, 231-3; relations with Afghanistan, 6-8, 22, 32-3, 40, 44-50, 104, 118, 121-9, 130-4, 137-44, 151-4, 173, 174, 178, 182-4, 205-7, 213-4, 219-20; Bokhara, 17-9, 45-6; with China, 67; Kashgar-Yarkand, 21-2, 45, 67-77, 81; Khokand, 16, 21, 46, 67; Persia, 3, 5-8, 10, 55, 102, 108-9, 115, 150, 261; Turkoman, 98-119, 261-2
- threat to India, 2, 12, 22, 28-31, 34-5, 41, 61-2, 110-14, 162, 171, 180, 201, 227-8, 253-5
- Sabzawar, 87
- Sadr-i-Azam, 10
- Salah, Khoja, 47-8, 88, 232
- Salisbury, Lord, 104, 137, 150-1, 153, 155, 157-60, 182, 203-4, 254
- Samara, 84
- Samarkand, 18, 28, 41, 83, 87-91; the occupation of, 181, 183, 210
- Sarakhs, 5, 20, 87, 89, 91, 117
- Sarikal, 47
- Schuvaloff, Court, 20, 103
- Scythians, 29
- Seistan, 6, 50, 56-61, 63-4, 131; Award, 133-4; 135, 145; question, 146; arbitration, 152, 172, 216-17, 230; Persian Sovereignty over, 261
- Semipalatinsk, 14, 83-4, 91
- Sergiopol, 84
- Shadi, 71, 75
- Shah, Fateh Ali, 6
- Mahmud, 2
- Muhammad, 6, 9
- Shah, Nur Muhammad, 137-8, 141, 146, 153, 172-3, 177, 182, 190, 196, 198, 200
- Shuja, 2, 8, 9, 194
- Zaman, the ruler of Afghanistan, 1, 2
- Shahrud, 87
- Shaikhs, Coastal, 235
- Shakabad, 24
- Shaw, R.B., 69, 77-8, 81
- Shibbergen, 48
- Shignan, 87
- Shirabad, 88
- Shutargardan, 185
- Siam, 258, British Policy towards, 260
- Siberia, 13, 14, 83-4, 89
- Sibi, 213, 217, 230
- Sikhs, 9
- Sikkim, 258-9
- Sind, 53, 161, 257
- Simla, 105, 145-7, 154, 171, 175, 231
- Simla Conference, 132, 137-8, 142, 144-6, 149, 153, 168, 173, 177, 196
- Siripool, 48
- Skobelev, Gen., 89, 114-15
- Srinagar, 87
- Stewart, Gen., 215
- Stolietoff, Gen., 204
- Suez Canal, 93-4, 201, 234, 249, 249
- Sukkur, 91

- Suttlej R., 1, 68
 Suzac, 15
 Swat, 180, 183-4, 186
 Syr Daria R., 10, 14-17, 27, 30, 69, 84-6, 92; *see also* Jaxartes, R.
 Taranchees, 21
 Tartars, 13
 Tashkand, 16-17, 20-1, 23, 28, 33-4, 41, 75, 83-5, 87-8, 90-2, 121, 213
 Tashkent, 15
 Tcherychaff Bay, 85
 Tchui, 17
 Tedgend, 118
 Teheran, 2-3, 6-7, 12, 38, 55-6, 59, 94-5; British envoy at, 107, 111-13, 115, 173; British influence at the Court of, 261
 Tekkes, 99, 101, 114, 149, *see also* Akkal Tekke and Turkomans, Tekke
 Tekma Sirdar, 115
 Telegraph, 234; convention, 54
 Terak Pass, 87
 Termez, 88
 Thoweynee, Saiyid, 237-8
 Tibet, 43, 256, 258-9, 263
 Tiflis, 89
 Tigris, R., 31, 94, 234, 257
 Todd, Major D'Arcy, 9
 Tokmak, 84
 Trans-Caspia, 100, 101, 115, 136, 141, 201
 Trans-Caucasian Railway, 85-6, 89, 94
 Treaty of : Berlin (1878), 113; Commerce, Russo-Kashgari, (1872), 22, 67; Indo-Kashgari (1874), 76-7; Frankenstein (1807), 2; Gulistan (1813), 5; Indo-Afghan (1855), 60, 122-5, 197-9; Paris (1857), 57, 69, 61-2, 146; Peace, Russia and Bokhara (1868), 18; Peking (1860), 67; Teheran 1814), 3-5; Tilsit (1807), 2-3; Turkmanchai (1828), 5, 10; Yarkand (1874), 76-7
 Trucial chiefs, 235, 236
 China, 79
 Gandamak, 214, 216-17, 219, 224-5
 interdict, 243
 Merv Turkomans, 117
 Tso-Tsuang-Tang, Gen., 79
 Tungans, 66, 79-80
 Turfan, 21
 Turga R., 14
 Turgai, 84
 Turi tribe, 226
 Turkey, 10, 94, 150, 201, 233-4; Sultan of 235, 245-50, 261
 Turki, 238, 240, 242-3
 Turkish Arabia, 96
 Turkistan, 14-15, 17, 32, 43, 66-70, 74, 81, 84-5; Russian conquest of, 85-6; Governor-General of, 151, 183, 210
 Turkomans, 20, 22, 48, 84, 86-7, 90, 99-100, 101-2, 104-7, 109, 111, 114-16, 136, 141-2, 149, 150
 Tekke, 85, 109-10, 112, 115, 180
 Turkomania, 97; Russian action in, 98, 113, 201, 261
 Turkoman Tribes, 87, 89, 97-101, 111
 Turkomanchai country, 110-11, 156, 180
 Treaty, 5, 10
 Turra, Ahrai, Khan, 73, 75
 Hakim Khan, 80
 Vali Khan, 66
 Turshuz, 87
 Umballa, *see* Ambala
 Ungeni, 90
 Urals, Mts., 13, 85
 Uralsk, 14
 Ust-Urt, 85
 Urumchi, 66
 Uzbeg States, 29
 Uzun-Agach, 15
 Vernoe, Fort. 15, 17, 84
 Volga R., 2, 85, 86, 22
 Wahabi, 236-41, 244, 246-7
 Wahabism, 234
 Wakhan, 47, 48, 134
 Wood, Sir Charles, 60
 Yakoob Beg (or Atalik Ghazi) ruler of Yarkand-Kashgar, 20-2, 46, 65-77, 80, 97
 Yakoob, Mahomed, of Afghanistan, 133, 173
 Yanghi Kala, 115
 Yarkand, 21, 22, 29, 43-6, 51, 65-80, 82, 131, 150, *see also* Kashgar
 Yarkand, Treaty of 1874, 76-7
 Yassin, Mir Wali of, 186-8
 Yazd, 5
 Yemen, Turkish interference in, 247, 249; a British Protectorate, 252
 Yomuds, the, 100-1, 105
 Yunnan, 260
 Zanzibar, ruler of, 236-7, 241-3
 Zarafshan, 18
 Zaweh, 87
 Zimmermann, Col., 15
 Zungaria, 20, 21; Khans of, 65-6, 78, 97

